Australian Council for Children's Film and Television

A History (1957-1989)

CHILDRENS HOLIDAY
FILM FESTIVAL 1965
MATINEE!
'EAGLE ROCK'
'The Missing Note'
'THE FLOOD'
RESERVED SEATS

by Betty Rankin

NLQ 791.45083 R 211

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Australian Council
for
Children's Films
and
Television

A HISTORY
(1957-1989)

By

Betty Rankin

Commissioned by the
Australian Council for Children's Films and Television
with assistance from the

Australian Film Commission

ISBN - 0-9592805-4-5

Published by
Australian Council for Children's
Films and Television
17 Street Andrew's Place
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002
AUSTRALIA

March 1990

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Australian Council for Children's Films and Television

Cover Photos
Audience reaction to a screening of 'Glitterball' at Bellerive Primary School, Tasmania (1980).
VCCFT Film Festival Committee Members Pam Marks, Margaret Standish, Alice Duncan, Dorothy Williams and friends at the Rivoli Theatre, Camberwell, Victoria (1965).

Ro17/46806/142
21.8.90

This history is dedicated to the co-founders of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television: Alice Lady Paton of Melbourne and the late W. H. (Bill) Perkins, AM, of Hobart.

About the Author

Betty Rankin, who has a Bachelor of Arts degree and a graduate diploma in Media Studies, was commissioned by the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television to research and write the history of their organisation.

Her interest in children's films and television began in 1966 when, as a representative of the Parents' Association of Fintona Girls' School, she joined the Victorian Council for Children's Films and Television (VCCFT) and participated in the organisation of several school holiday film festivals.

In recent years she has given lectures on the theme of children and television to secondary and tertiary level students. She has also written a series of newsletters for the VCCFT and has contributed to some of its submissions and reports.

In 1984 she was appointed to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Victoria Advisory Council.

B017/46606 / NL
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First Biennial Meeting of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television held at the Vice-Chancellor's House, University of Melbourne, 22-23 May 1959. Among those present: Lady Paton (second from left facing front), W.H. (Bill) Perkins (fifth from left facing front) and Barbara Vaughan (front right).

Foreword

It is said that history is an interview with the winners. It could be said that this history of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television is an interview with the survivors. It is a labour of love, as is so much of what is contained in it. Betty Rankin does not pretend to write a history of the distribution and exhibition of children's films in Australia or the regulation of Australian children's television. She has recorded a history of an organisation of mothers and teachers concerned about the quality of children's films. This organisation, started over 30 years ago, has not only survived but has been the mainstay of the fight for quality children's films and television.

This history has documented that fight by the Australian Council and the various state councils and provides a reminder that history so often repeats itself. It will also be useful as source material for future Ph. D students who are interested in the political history of children's film and television.

I first contacted the Australian Council when I returned to Australia in 1968 as the mother of a small daughter and was appalled by the standard of children's television. I had left Australia as a proud Argonaut in my early teens and been disappointed with the offerings of the whimsical BBC Children's Hour. Returning as a television producer, I wanted to find out why Australian children's television had not followed the proud tradition of the Argonauts.

I tried to find someone who was as concerned as I was about the standard of children's television. I soon discovered that the producers and the film and television unions were fighting battles to produce **any** Australian television and did not place children's television very high on their priorities. However I did discover the NSW Council for Children's Films and Television who were active in persuading exhibitors to show quality children's films in the school holidays and were anxious to be involved in getting better children's television. Thus began my association with the Australian Council - an association which has lasted, in different ways, ever since.

It therefore gives me a great deal of pleasure to be asked to write this foreword. I suggested some years ago that a history of the Council should be documented because I was concerned that the background to battles which are still being fought today should be better understood. I have the vain hope that if the politicians, bureaucrats and regulators responsible for making decisions about children's television were to know that the arguments put to them by vested interests are not new, they would not continuously ask for submissions from hard pressed voluntary groups to provide them with counter arguments.

This history shows that the battles in the 1950s and 1960s with the film distributors and exhibitors to provide quality children's films are no different from the battles in the 1960s , 1970s and 1980s with commercial television licensees to provide quality children's television.

The cut and thrust of the fights are the same: the arguments with commercial film distributors and exhibitors to show films made specifically for children as opposed to family films or adult films which children find entertaining; the concerns about violence; the attempts to get films classified as suitable for children; and the difficulty producers find in entering the world of the child.

However, it is thanks to the Australian Council, all the State Councils and the enormous amount of voluntary labour that has been given over the years by many people to provide children with quality films that today Australia does have all the following:

- a television regulatory body which sets standards for children's programs;
- a quota for Australian children's drama;
- a committee which determines the quality of children's programs on television; and
- a Children's Television Foundation which produces high quality children's drama.

I hope that the writing of this history will do two things. Firstly, it will mean that there is no longer any argument about:

- the need for film and television to be made specifically for children;
- the definition of a children's program (a program made by producers and writers who have studied the special needs of children and understand that a program relevant to children is one that has a child-driven plot and is not a program that merely entertains children); and
- the inability of licensees to determine what are quality films and television programs made specifically for children, because of the licensees' interest in maximising audiences to make profits.

Secondly, such a history may convince the economic rationalists that market forces will not ensure that children receive quality Australian programs. If all the voluntary labour of the members of the Australian Council in all the states were priced and added to the costs of imported children's films, the price one would have to pay for admission at the box office would be prohibitive.

At the very least I hope that this history will demonstrate to the decision-makers involved in children's film and television that quality Australian film and television programs made specifically for children have to be protected and nurtured: children need to see their own culture reflected in their own terms. Such locally-produced programs, however, cannot compete commercially with overseas programs dumped by overseas distributors. Protection against the dumping of goods is accepted in most other areas of the economy, even by economic rationalists.

This history shows that children's film and television is an area where the profit seekers have managed to skew the debate and marginalise the arguments of the concerned public by calling them 'do-gooders' and 'moralists'. These profit seekers, however, cannot diminish the public's demand that Australian children deserve the best that Australian producers and writers can provide for them.

Julie James Bailey
Sydney

April 1990

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the President, Patricia Braithwaite, and the members of the Australian Council fo Children's Films and Television (ACCFT) for giving me the opportunity to research and write the history of their organisation.

Much of the reference material I gathered together, some of it from the unofficial archives of suburban homes and garages, is now housed at the office of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television in Melbourne. Other material was found in the State Libraries of Melbourne and Adelaide, the Archives of the University of Melbourne, the Australian Government Archives in Brighton, Melbourne, the Melbourne office of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, and from offices of the Children's Film and Television Councils in some of the states. I am indebted to the members of those organisations who gave me their assistance.

Travel opportunities were limited but individuals I contacted, and would particularly like to thank for their help with information, are: Elaine Archer, Barbara Biggins, Peter Benn, Patricia Edgar, Barbara Falk, Rosemary Farrow, Henry Geddes, Rupert Goodman, Sarah Guest, Cynthia Hurst, Adrian Jose, Catherine King, the late Frank Meaney, David McKelvey, Alice Paton, Joanne Priest, Jack Quaine, the late Newman Rosenthal, Edwin Schefferle, Enid Shann, Eileen Sharman, Edward Snell (especially for the information in his unpublished 1977 work 'For the Children'), Marion Sullivan, Hilda Symonds and Barbara Vaughan.

To Patricia Braithwaite and Elizabeth McDowall, Manager of the ACCFT, I am especially grateful. Their availability, their willingness to answer questions and their unwavering enthusiasm for the project has been invaluable.

Betty Rankin
Melbourne
1989

Introduction

This is the story of several voluntary organisations; organisations which in their different ways have individually and collectively, under the auspices of their national body, the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, contributed to the development of visual entertainment for children in Australia. It is not a success story in terms of the time and effort taken, and the small achievements that have been made. However, the story is far from finished as new people with similar ideals and fresh ideas keep appearing to continue the work of the early activists.

This story began in the 1940s when the idea of cinema films made specially for children was developed in Britain and, despite the odds, began to grow in Australia. A need for these films was keenly felt by some Australian adults, and this feeling was exacerbated by the introduction of television in 1956.

The dearth of television programs for children was officially recognised, although in 1964, eight years after the first broadcasts began in Australia, the government-appointed television authority, the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, reported that it was regularly informed that the tastes of Australian audiences including those of adolescents and children were becoming increasingly sophisticated. It was of some concern to the Board that this belief was being applied 'almost to the extent that no longer are children assumed to have any childhood' and that even the few programs designed for children between the ages of seven and 12 years had almost entirely disappeared from Australian television screens. This perception of the lack of visual entertainment designed for children was not a new phenomenon, and it was not a problem peculiar to Australia, although it was in Australia that community organisations had, since the early 1950s, worked energetically to encourage the production and screening of cinema films for children. They were no less enthusiastic in their support for children's television programs.

Television had very quickly become an integral and influential part of daily life in Australia and they believed that children should be encouraged by their parents to use the medium with discretion. They also believed that a responsibility lay with the exclusive group of television licence-holders in Australia to encourage the development and screening of programs of appeal and of value to young Australian children; programs that would challenge, and encourage them to take an active and positive interest in their own lives.

But there were enormous difficulties for these 'do-gooders', as they were dubbed, for they found that recognising 'children' as a particular segment of a mass audience with special needs was no more popular with the advertising-funded Australian television organisations than it had been with the internationally dominated film industry. It had not taken long for the first commercial television operators in Australia to find that they could readily attract audiences of all ages with favourably priced American cartoons, American situation comedies, and American drama series. The alternative, the government-funded ABC, was slow to start and in appealing to audiences of children it proved to be no match for the more aggressive commercial sector.

From their experiences of screening films to children in cinemas and halls, the advocates of children's television were convinced that attracting children to programs of variety and potential value was not an impossible task. With appropriate promotion, and the interest and support of parents, they had found that children could be encouraged to explore and enjoy a wide range of different program topics and styles.

However, the advice of outsiders was not welcomed by members of the television industry and their advertising colleagues, some of whom reacted very defensively, dismissing their critics as 'an elitist minority', 'anti-business', 'Marxists', 'academic fascists', or 'the lunatic fringe'.

The evidence suggests otherwise. Certainly, the children's film and television councils in Australia have attracted a diverse range of members and supporters over nearly 40 years, but their behaviour has been overwhelmingly pragmatic rather than politically or ideologically inspired. The first members saw a need for children's films and they responded, receiving in return the rewards described by a former President of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, Bill Perkins.

> *The best children's films, like the best children's books appeal to adults as well as children, and one of the greatest pleasures for adults is to observe the enjoyment of children as they experience the films.*

The Council members of today, in responding to the many changes which have taken place in the film and television industries, are becoming more involved with children's material on video-cassette. The viewing experience is very different, but the objectives of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television and its affiliated Councils remain essentially the same as when they began:

> *To stimulate and maintain the public's interest in the provision of suitable entertainment film, television and video programs for children.*

Chapter 1

Victoria Discovers Children's Films

The women on the Committee of the Staff and Distaff Nursery School at the University of Melbourne had no inkling of what they were starting when they decided, as part of an effort to raise funds for a second-hand piano, to hold a 'Children's Picture Afternoon'.

In 1949 this was an unusual idea and the Committee President, Alice Paton, approached Newman Rosenthal, the University's Director of Visual Aids, for assistance. He suggested that children's films made by Mary Field for the Rank Organisation in Britain would be very suitable for the occasion.

The afternoon was a huge success. The final payment for the piano was raised, and children of all ages obviously enjoyed the films screened for them. But the parents who had accompanied their offspring were not satisfied with this single event and they asked for more.

Alice Paton, a parent, a science graduate of the University of Melbourne and a former school teacher, had only a very slight knowledge of films but she was well aware of the attraction they held for children. The idea of screening material made specially for them captured her interest and she turned again to Newman Rosenthal for further help. He responded with enthusiasm.[1]

With many years of experience behind him Newman Rosenthal had gained a vast knowledge and respect for film as an educational and entertainment medium. He had learned from his work in visual communication that it could be a very powerful influence and if used responsibly he believed it had enormous potential. As Officer in Charge of Visual Training for the Royal Australian Airforce during World War II he had had the opportunity to experiment with visual material as an aid to instruction and, despite initial prejudice, was able to introduce training films to assist with difficult teaching problems.[2]

This type of training film, succesful with motivated adults, had quite different objectives from films designed for entertainment. But Newman Rosenthal never found any reason to doubt that the latter, intended to entertain by appealing to the imagination and emotions of the viewer with a variety of cinematic techniques, also had the potential to inform and influence viewers of all ages.[3] He believed strongly that film should always be used responsibly, and later, as his experience with children's films grew, he wrote:

> *Surely it is just so much common sense to apply to this instrument of film which has become so intimate a factor in our daily life, the same criteria as we do in our examination of all other influences on social behaviour and social welfare.*

> *... Surely it is absurd to accept the cinema for propoganda on health and deny that it can influence the minds of children in other directions? Any effect the films have will depend on the receptivity of the minds who see them, on the ideas to which, in the language of physiology and psychiatry, they are conditioned, and on the type of film.*
>
> *... We do know a great deal today of what a child likes and dislikes, what pleases and what frightens him. Why do we not apply that knowledge to film? ... For the child there is a kind of joyous delight when he recognises in a picture or on the screen something which is part of his daily life - an object, a gesture, some act which belongs already to the world of his own experience.*[4]

But Newman Rosenthal was a realist and he was well aware of the economics of film-making with the huge international entertainment film industry seeking to attract large audiences. Therefore, if film was to develop in what he believed was the right direction, the growth of discriminating and demanding audiences was essential.

> *The men and women who work in films know well enough the vast potentialities of the most popular of all the arts. The idealists, the creative artists are inside the motion picture industry as well as outside it. If they are to look to the future of the art rather than to the past experience of the industry, then they must have a public which can appreciate their vision and which will encourage their resolve.*[5]

However, surveys had indicated that adults were prepared to attend cinemas whatever films were showing[6] and a 1949 study conducted by E.R. Wyeth of the University of Melbourne's School of Education suggested a similar lack of discrimination by children. Most of those surveyed went to the cinema less than once a week, although they expressed a desire to attend more frequently. They enjoyed comedies and cowboy pictures but said they did not like or really want the love or gangster films that were screened.[7]

Providing an alternative by screening programs specially designed for children was very appealing to Newman Rosenthal as he believed that if children were given the opportunity to experience a variety of films, together with education in film appreciation, they would learn to apply the discrimination that seemed to be lacking in adults.[8]

After the first successful screening for children in 1949 further screenings of the Rank films were held at the University and a demonstration screening was arranged for adults. The 500 educationalists, social workers, church leaders and others who attended this event saw a representative selection of films from the J. Arthur Rank organisation, Children's Entertainment Films (CEF), which included an episode from a magazine series of children's activities, one from a series of slapstick comedies, and a community singing cartoon. A simple story with an implied moral theme followed, and a comedy thriller with a theme of co-operation.

Questionnaires were distributed to the audience, and in response to one of the questions, 'Do you consider this type of program is more suitable for children's cinema than films produced for adults, but cut by the censor?', 425 answered 'Yes' and one answered 'No'.[9]

Support from adults such as these, together with the positive responses of their child audiences, encouraged Alice Paton and Newman Rosenthal to start gathering information about the availability of similar films in Australia, and in other countries, as they searched for material to use in the future.

While visiting Britain in November 1949, Newman Rosenthal met J. Arthur Rank and was invited to a Children's Cinema Club screening, a rare privilege for an adult unaccompanied by a child. He observed the children participating enthusiastically in the program, singing along to familiar tunes and eagerly discussing the possible outcome of the serial as they departed. The event enthralled him and he wrote to Alice Paton:

> *Did you ever have some experience or other which literally compelled you to write and tell somebody about it! I have just returned from a Children's Cinema Club session in one of the toughest districts of London and I am just overwhelmed. Some thousand odd youngsters of all types joined in lustily singing 'John Brown's Body', 'There'll Always be an England' etc. followed by the National Anthem as preliminary to one hour and a half [of] very good film. At the end of which the crowd just melted away excitedly discussing, in anticipation, what the hero might do in next week's episode of 'The Mystery of the Snake Skin Belt' - and can you believe it! - the actual belt described in the film was on view in the foyer!*[10]

In Melbourne the screening of the Rank children's films continued with the support of the University. However, it became obvious that in order to handle long-term planning a properly organised group would be essential and in October 1950 the Victorian Council for Children's Films was established. By then the screenings were attracting wider attention and the inaugural meeting was attended by representatives of 16 educational and community organisations.

When he addressed the audience Newman Rosenthal emphasised the need to take a positive approach to the films that children viewed. Censorship was not the answer. He firmly believed that every effort should be made to expose children to good films, rather than trying to remove the bad.

Newman Rosenthal was elected President of the new organisation, with Alice Paton, Chairman. Plans were discussed for regular screenings at the University's Union Theatre the following year. It was reported that some of the Rank children's films were being screened at a theatre in Geelong and at three theatres in Bendigo, so in the first of many wider activities members of the new Council decided to encourage the Melbourne cinema exhibitors to use the films at their weekly matinees.[11]

By the end of its first year the Council was flourishing. The monthly screenings had been well attended, there was £108 in the bank and the members represented 35 different educational and community organisations. One section of the commercial film industry, the exhibitors Hoyts Theatres Ltd., had expressed interest in the films and agreed to try them in some of their matinee programs in Victoria.

The declared aims of the new Council - 'to stimulate and maintain public interest in the provision of suitable films for children and to arrange for the screening of such films' - appeared to be developing very satisfactorily.

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[1] Betty Rankin, Interview with Alice Paton, 6/9/83, Minutes of Nursery School Meetings, 1948-49

[2] Newman Rosenthal, 'Films in Instruction, Part 1, Films Their Use and Misuse', Robertson and Mullens, 1945, pp. 3-4

[3] ibid, p. 5

[4] Newman Rosenthal (Ed.), 'Visual Aids Review', Vol. 1, No. 2, Visual Aids Department, Melbourne University, Vol. 1 No. 2, May, 1951

[5] Newman Rosenthal, 'Films in Our Lives', F.W.Cheshire, 1953, p. 2

[6] ibid, pp. 2-3

[7] E.R. Wyeth, 'Children and the Cinema', in 'Visual Aids Review', Vol. 1, No. 1, Visual Aids Department, Melbourne University, August, 1950, pp. 20-22

[8] Newman Rosenthal, 'Films in Our Lives', pp. 3-11

[9] 'Review', Vol.1, No. 3, Sept. 1949, Visual Aids Department, Melbourne University, unpublished

[10] Letter, Newman. Rosenthal to Alice Paton, Nov. 1949

[11] Report of Meeting, VCCFT, 18/10/50

Chapter 2

The Rank Films and Mary Field

The children's films from CEF being promoted in Victoria had evolved as the result of an idea J. Arthur Rank had in 1943.

Mr. (later Lord) Rank was a man of many parts. He was a prominent and successful British film producer, he was a religious man and taught in Sunday School, and he was Chairman of the Odeon and Gaumont theatre chain in which films were screened to about 400,000 British children at Saturday matinees each week. Mr. Rank's inquiries about the films that were screened in his theatres elicited the information that the best available were those considered not harmful for young audiences. He decided to make films which would do them some good.

There was immediate opposition to his plan as, although Russia had been producing children's films since the early 1930s and other countries had made isolated attempts with individual shorts, the making of entertainment films for children was a new idea for the 'rigidly organised' British film industry. It was also new to a public which tended to support the unsubstantiated belief that films, although attractive to children, were bad for them.[1]

Criticism was also raised by psychologists who warned that research should be done first to find children's reactions to films, and Mr. Rank was accused of simply attempting to build audiences for the Junior Cinema Clubs in his theatres.[2]

But J. Arthur Rank was a determined man and although Britain was still at war, with film technicians and equipment in short supply, he decided that an immediate start would be made with the weekly production of a 10-minute children's film designed to tell a simple moral story.

He selected Gaumont-British Instructional Films, a company belonging to his large organisation, for this task although its Managing Director, Bruce H. Woolfe and other members including Mary Field were not at all impressed with his idea. They were accustomed to producing recognised genres of educational and documentary film and although they also had some experience with short entertainment productions, the prospect of making moral films for children at a time when they were busy with a heavy wartime schedule held little appeal. In addition, Mr. Rank instructed them to take note of specifications laid down by the controllers of the Cinema Clubs who would be paying for and screening the films.

The first script was considered unsuitable as it had little action. The permission of the controllers was obtained and it was re-written to include a chase. In 1943 there was a shortage of equipment and film stock, petrol for location work was in short supply, and so was food for the crew. There was even a problem finding a new child-size bicycle to use. But finally, the first of the Rank children's films, 'Tom's Ride', became a reality and it was shown to Mr. Rank and his executives. The film pleased him and he persuaded the still reluctant Mary Field to take charge of the production of a similar short film each week.[3]

Nine years later, a totally converted Mary Field described that initial screening, and subsequent events:

> *The film took ten minutes to show but the discussion which followed took over an hour. The problem was whether virtue should be its own reward or whether Tom should have a present for returning the wallet. The decision was finally in favour of virtue unrewarded ... no one who had anything to do with this short film could have imagined that Tom would go riding through film history, tearing up the entire organisation of the whole international industry as he charged forward to the railway station and to the ultimate triumph of Mr. Rank's new idea.*[4]

When she began making children's films Mary Field was a director of G-B Instructional Films and although she had been making educational material for 18 years she felt that it was an enormous responsibility for any commercial organisation to attempt to influence the morals of weekly audiences of 400,000 children. The propaganda use of film by the German and Italian film industries had served as a warning to all film makers. Therefore, to ensure that her productions for children would have wide public acceptance, she proposed that a National Advisory Council be formed. Mr. Rank agreed and the Council was established with members selected from government departments and national organisations interested in the leisure activities of children.[5]

In September 1944 the Advisory Council was ready to hold its first meeting, and by then preliminary treatments of 'Sally Sparrow' (a nature film with a commentary in rhyming couplets); a cartoon, 'Robbie Finds a Gun'; 'Our Club Magazine' (a children's film magazine); and 'Sports Day' (a short school story), were all available for comment.

It was immediately evident to Mary Field that satisfying everybody's ideas of what a children's film should be was going to be difficult. The result of that first meeting and subsequent experiences convinced the film makers that if they were to have any hope of fulfilling the diverse expectations of not only their Advisory Council, but also the censor, the exhibitors, and most importantly the audiences for whom the films were intended, a wide variety of programs would be needed.

'Children's' films were new and regular discussions and experimentation were found to be necessary as they evolved. To Mary Field's great relief Mr Rank left them entirely alone and, although over the next six years they diverged markedly from his original instructions, he continued to provide funds for their work.

The pressure of wartime filming meant that the children's productions had to be spread amongst a number of different companies and this was found to be so successful in helping to create the much needed diversity that it became regular policy. Mary Field and her department eventually took on a co-ordinating role, initiating and supervising the new productions, to which many groups contributed.

The idea of entertainment films designed for children continued to be difficult for outsiders to grasp, and on a visit to America and Canada Mary Field found a good deal of scepticism about the idea. In both countries educational or documentary films were still deemed to be more appropriate for children. At home in England a cool reception to the films was also given by the London press. But the criticism served to create a bond between all those who were working on the project and they became increasingly enthusiastic about its possibilities. Film producers, the Cinema Club controllers and the Advisory Council members were all encouraged to develop their ideas and to contribute to a clearly defined production policy for the future.[6]

Child audiences showed their appreciation of the efforts of the new organisation and other countries began to take an interest in the work. The Dutch bought films in 1945 and to encourage further international activity Mary Field purchased a film made by the Norwegians in Scotland during the war. She created an English version by adding an introduction spoken by an English boy.[7]

The possibilities seemed endless. In 1945 attempts were made to lighten the moral themes, and 'documentary-style' backgrounds were used to add interest and information to simple stories. Children were introduced to aspects of farming in England, the English canals and even Niagara Falls. Two serials were planned, one to be filmed in South Devon and the other in Australia. When plans for the latter were changed the 1947 Australian production became the first full-length children's feature, 'Bush Christmas'. This was written and produced by a New Zealander, Ralph Smart.

> *The first full-length film ever to be made exclusively for children.- Age of audience - between seven and twelve years. That was all the briefing I received when I contracted to make a feature in Australia for the Children's Entertainment Films Section of the J. Arthur Rank Organisation.*[8]

Patricia Latham, from Mary Field's department, was script editor for the film, but there were few established precedents to follow. Maximum action seemed essential with a minimum amount of dialogue, and children were given leading roles. This made casting difficult although Australia, unlike England, did not have restrictions precluding the use of children under the age of 14 years. Finally, children aged six, 11, 12 and 13 years, with previous acting experience were selected, and an Aboriginal boy from a reserve in Queensland. Actor Chips Rafferty, the Australian bush archetype, had a major part and an Australian cameraman, George Heath, was chosen because according to Ralph Smart, 'I knew he would capture the sharp, brilliant out-door qualities of the bush country.'[9]

The film was widely distributed in both English and non-English speaking countries, screening to audiences of children and adults. It was, according to Mary Field, frequently described as the ideal children's film.[10]

Other significant events occurred in 1947. The children's film department adopted the name Children's Entertainment Films (CEF) and based on the knowledge gained in the first three years a policy for future productions was defined.

This policy made a clear distinction between 'moral instruction', which it was considered belonged to home, church and school, and 'moral education', which was gained from life experience and contact with others. The children's films were to emphasise the latter and were designed:

> *... to provide the children in the cinemas, Saturday by Saturday, with an opportunity of coming in contact with children and adults who were, unconsciously, good examples. These screen characters behaved well, but not too well, in circumstances into which our young audiences could readily project themselves.*[11]

Another significant change was the receipt of an annual budget which allowed for better planning between the producers, the members of the Advisory Council, and the exhibitors, all of whom continued to contribute their ideas on the programs needed.

The status of children's films within the British film industry rose as popular and technically excellent work appeared. It was, Mary Field claimed, the most difficult and demanding form of production. The films had to be very simple, clear, and absolutely precise, as children were quick to perceive and criticise any anomalies. She considered the productions provided a challenge to leading technicians and actors who, from time to time, offered their services both as a duty and for the discipline it provided.[12]

The difficulties and the rewards were described by Geoffrey Barkas who made two of the early films, 'The Little Ballerina', a film designed to introduce children to the ballet and which marked the appearance of Margot Fonteyn on film for the first time, and 'Daisy Bates', the first children's serial.

> *Entering children's films the producer finds himself in a new world. The familiar sign posts are missing. The box office is no longer his guide - or his master.*[13]

This freedom was essential for producers trying to appeal to children of both sexes between the ages of seven and 14 years, as well as satisfying the demands of the British Board of Film Censors, the members of the Rank organisation and their Advisory Coucil, but there were significant rewards:

> *What a man gets out of children's films depends of course on what he puts into them - and what he wants of life. I believe he must enter this arena with something like a crusading spirit - convinced that the work is enormously worthwhile. ... After all, there is no audience quite like it. None so eager to be entertained - none more worth entertaining.*[14]

Don Chaffey, who directed films for both Children's Entertainment Films and its successor the Children's Film Foundation, had similar experiences to relate when he addressed the Society of Film Teachers in London in 1954. A member of the audience, Kathleen Hadley, wrote to a very receptive Alice Paton in Australia:

> *...his sincerity, integrity and sheer love of making a good film for children showed through everything he said. He certainly knows a thing or two about his audience, and says he follows his films around to lots of Saturday matinees to find out how to make his next picture better - even within the limitations imposed by the CFF.*[15]

Wide input to the films was constantly sought as conferences with film technicians and with educationists and social workers continued. But always of paramount importance were the interests and the responses of the children themselves. Regular reports of audience reaction were received from cinema managers in Britain, and from Canada, where the films were also being shown.

In order to obtain more systematic information two audience research methods were developed by Mary Field. The first was to record the sound track of a film with accompanying noises from the audience; the second was to select frames from a film and record audience responses to these with infra-red photography. The results could then be used to guide later productions.

Eventually, despite the absence of a children's category, three feature films were entered in the 1947 Brussels Film Festival and they received a very favourable response from the adult audience. It meant wider international recognition, and Henri Storck, a Belgian producer of art films, was later appointed by UNESCO to undertake an international study of children's films.

Other successes followed. In 1948 at the Venice Film Festival a special children's category was introduced and not surprisingly the British pioneers dominated, winning one gold and two silver medals. But they were very keen to develop the movement internationally and arranged for children's films from several countries to be shown in Britain the following year.

It proved to be difficult. Most children's films from Europe were shorts, although the Russians and Scandinavians were able to provide more substantial material. Czechoslovakia made a contribution to the Edinburgh Festival of 1950 but it was evident that only Britain and Russia had organisations which appeared to be sufficiently well established for sustained production.

But in 1950 it looked as though it might all be over when the financial crisis in the British film industry forced Mr. Rank to close Children's Entertainment Films.[16] However, seven years had been long enough for the idea of children's films to attract the interest of the British public and the British film industry. It had also attracted the attention of the academic community which viewed the achievements of CEF very favourably. The 1950 Wheare Report, the result of a two and a half year inquiry into children and the cinema, expressed approval of the Rank films and of the well organised Children's Cinema Clubs.[17]

In July 1951 a new organisation was incorporated under the name 'Children's Film Foundation Ltd.' (CFF). This was the result of a co-operative effort between members of the British film industry, including J. Arthur Rank, who was elected Chairman of Directors after being nominated by the four Film Trade Associations. Other directors were nominated by the Association of Specialised Film Producers, the British Film Producers' Association, the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Kinematograph Renters' Society Limited. In October they appointed Mary Field, who had been awarded an OBE for her services to child education, to the position of executive officer.

The intention of the Foundation was to produce children's films for the use of distributors and exhibitors as its members were keen to demonstrate that the film industry could make suitable entertainment that children would enjoy. Initial finance for the non-profit making body came from a grant of £59,000 from the British Film Production Fund Ltd., with a further £100,000 from the board. It was expected that receipts from the distribution of the first films would be used to finance continuing productions and it was anticipated that with the changes that take place in child audiences the films produced by the CFF could be re-released successfully after five years.

The lessons learned by CEF were not wasted, and although stories were selected by the CFF and script development was closely supervised, several different production companies were again used for making the films.

The board recognised that retention of child audiences was vital for the future of the new organisation and high production requirements were laid down which included the use of a wide variety of locations and sets, and skilled camera work specially suited to children. Because they had been so popular in the past emphasis was given to action stories like 'Bush Christmas' and 'The Secret Tunnel' with girls as well as boys in leading roles.

Local and international requirements for complete one and a half hour programs, which included a feature film and shorts, were also taken into account in developing the first production schedules.[18]

Mary Field retained her interest in audience research and a grant from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust enabled her to refine her previous methods.

In applying for the grant she pointed out the limitations of earlier studies which had done no more than attempt to establish the impact of films on individuals with the use of questionnaires. This was difficult with adults and was, she considered, practically impossible with children who tended to be susceptible to many influences when giving answers. The extensive United States Payne Fund inquiry and others devised by psychologists, sociologists, teachers, social workers and government departments in many different countries all had limitations for practising film-makers. Henri Storck's report for UNESCO referred to previous work which highlighted a need for films for children, but it offered no real information for the people making them.

The British Wheare Committee also recognised the deficiencies of research which tended to focus on the effects of adult films on children, and it had recommended further studies which had the support and understanding of people working within the film industry.[19]

Again using infra-red photography, Mary Field built on the work she had undertaken for CEF. Frames which were expected to engender responses such as concentration, pity, horror, suspense, laughter, and sexual interest were selected, and photographs of audience members were taken at these points as the films were screened. From the photographs she obtained information about the low level of interest which occurred during prolonged adult conversation, children's acceptance of foreign speech, the pleasure derived from anticipation, and the need for discretion when using close-ups, particularly during any scenes of violence.[20]

After four years the Foundation reported a steady rise in bookings for their films which were distributed extensively throughout Britain. Thirty-three other countries had also exhibited them.[21] In Australia, with the notable exception of 'Bush Christmas', the response to CFF films by the local film trade was restrained. The genre 'children's' films was unknown and 'Bush Christmas', favourably reviewed in the trade press in 1948 as a 'beguiling little picture that seems certain to do big business wherever it is shown', was described as 'ideal family fare'. It had, according to the reviewer, shattered records in Brisbane and Melbourne and was doing outstanding trading in Sydney.

> *Its prime points of appeal are the natural acting of the youngsters and the splendid photography by George Heath. Produced entirely out of doors, the production exhales a natural freshness and youthful exuberance. The story, telling how five children catch three horse thieves is elementary and on the implausible side, but the film originally was intended for child consumption only and the story was no doubt fitted to the vivid imaginations of the very young. Producer Smart gets away with it for his film certainly 'has something.'*[22]

A week later, in response to its favourable reception in America, a 'Film Weekly' Editorial also acclaimed the film:

> *The Australian motion picture industry can properly take pride in the excellent U.S. trade reviews of 'Bush Christmas'. Producer Ralph Smart comes in for deserved kudos and all reviews praise the lens-work of veteran Australian cameraman George Heath. If any further tribute is wanting, its local box-office performance supplies that.*[23]

At a premiere in Newcastle, NSW, the well-known Australian star, Chips Rafferty, stirred national pride and received a big response from the audience when he proclaimed:

> *'Bush Christmas' is a film made about Australia, by Australians, for Australians, in Australia...*[24]

Four months later, Norman B. Rydge, Chairman of Directors of the film distributors, British Empire Films (BEF), announced in Sydney that features and shorts made expressly for children by the Rank organisation would be distributed in Australia. Two hundred of the films were already in the country, and a continuous 52 weeks' service would be available with enough footage each week to make up half a matinee program.

These films, described by BEF's General Manager, Gordon Ellis, as 'wholesome but entertaining', were sure, Mr. Ellis believed, to receive the support of the Education Department, parents and citizens' groups, and 'other such bodies'.[25]

It was not a description guaranteed to excite local exhibitors, and the early commercial interest in children's films in Australia appears to have been short-lived.

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[1] Mary Field, 'Good Company', Longmans Green and Co., London, 1952, pp.1-2

[2] F. Hardy, 'Film', April, 1948

[3] Mary Field, 'Good Company', pp. 2-5

[4] ibid, pp. 4-5

[5] ibid, pp. 5-7

[6] ibid, pp. 8-14

[7] ibid, p. 21

[8] Ralph Smart, 'Film', May, 1948

[9] ibid

[10] Mary Field, 'Good Company', p. 172

[11] ibid, p. 28

[12] Mary Field on audiotape, 'UNESCO East-West Project', 1954

[13] Geoffrey Barkas, 'Film', August, 1948

[14] ibid

[15] Letter, Kathleen Hadley to Alice Paton, 24/10/54

[16] Mary Field, 'Good Company', pp. 34-40

[17] 'Children's Cinema Clubs or Matinees', Extracts from the Wheare Report, 'Visual Aids Review', Vol. 1, No. 1, August, 1950, and Report of the Children's Film Foundation Ltd., July, 1951 - April, 1952

[18] CFF Report, July, 1951 April, 1952

[19] Mary Field, 'Children and Films - A Study of Boys and Girls in the Cinema', Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, Dunfermline, Fife, 1954, pp. 1-6

[20] ibid, pp. 21-32

[21] CFF Report, 1955, pp. 4 & 6

[22] 'Film Weekly', 15/1/48

[23] 'Film Weekly', 22/1/48

[24] 'Film Weekly', 22/1/48

[25] 'Film Weekly', 13/5/48

Chapter 3

Exhibiting Children's Films in Victoria

The 1950s were years of increasing activity for the members of the children's film organisation in Victoria. Adults and children continued to respond favourably to their film screenings, and their knowledge of entertainment films for children rapidly increased. The impending introduction of television to Australia also attracted their attention at this time and in 1952 the Council's name was changed to the Victorian Council for Children's Films and Television.

Barbara Falk, a member of the Council, wrote an article for the University of Melbourne's 'Visual Aids Review' in which she described aspects of public opinion about children and films. She emphasised that it was not possible without extensive research to estimate the extent to which concerned parents existed in the community but in the first 18 months members of her Council had been asked by several organisations to discuss the subject of children's film-going. They made visits to State School Mothers' Clubs, Parents' Associations of the Free Kindergarten, Mothers' Unions of suburban churches, and the Parent-Teacher Associations of secondary schools.

> *In some groups very strong views were expressed about the artistic poverty of the films shown to the children; poor shots, bad sequences, jumbled stories, bad acting, poor characterisation were frequently mentioned.*
>
> *... Almost without exception groups complained that it was virtually impossible to know in advance of the suitability of the WHOLE programme which they permitted a child to attend. The grouping of a film for General Exhibition with one suitable for adults was mentioned by many parents as a difficulty in taking children to evening shows.*[1]

Although many of these parents revealed unspecified dissatisfaction with the films shown to their children, they tended to give them permission to attend. Many tried to limit attendances by providing alternative activities.[2]

More specific concern was expressed by Professor Alan Stout, Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of Sydney, who was also Chairman of the NSW Films Council, and President of the Australian Council of Film Societies. He believed that although many people criticised the crime and sex in films, the worst influence could come from the long-term inculcation of false values. He was concerned with films that portrayed lives of idle luxury associated with ambition, and centred around the acquisition of riches, power and adulation. These attributes appeared to be acquired through luck, influence or personal glamour and were not necessarily associated with much effort or hard work. In the films, opposition to these aspirations was inevitably dismissed with aggression or violence, rather than by reason.

Like Newman Rosenthal, Professor Stout believed the solution did not lie with censorship, which dealt only with isolated incidents, but in making and screening films designed for young audiences; films of adventure and excitement which showed values of sincerity, tolerance and friendship, together with love of home and parents; films which would encourage children to develop an eager interest in the world.

He praised the Rank children's films and the Victorian Council for Children's Films which:

> *...has done valuable pioneer work with these, in the face of the contention of some of the industry's representatives that Australian children are too 'tough' to take them. The Council's success gives the lie to this; but if it were true that our children insist on blood and violence; it would be a pretty damning indictment of the cinema in Australia, which has thus conditioned them.*[3]

As the Rank films became better known in Victoria Alice Paton received letters from individuals and organisations in country towns, and from Melbourne suburban areas.[4]

And from Sydney:

> *Can you tell me please from whom I can find out where and when approved children's films are being shown? I have three children, aged from nine down. My wife and I have been inclined to keep them away from films to protect them from unsuitable ones, but this cannot be continued. We realize that film should be a positive part of a child's upbringing, but we don't know how to find out when suitable ones are shown in our district.*[5]

Favourable comments were also received from adults who had attended the children's film sessions at the Union Theatre in Melbourne:

> *The children's behaviour during the showing of the films was really wonderful and they were all so interested. I was in a good position to note their reactions and they seemed to enjoy every picture.*[6]

> *It was so very refreshing to see a whole delightful show that was so full of interest...'The Stolen Airliner' was especially good in this respect. The intense interest in scenes taken in the Vicker's Armstrong factory and the R.A.F. stations ... they were so instructive and the children's vocal delight when Right triumphed over Evil was most delightful to hear.*
>
> *There can be no doubt whatsoever that the programme was fully appreciated by every child present (and at least two adults).*[7]

There was another letter which was read on the ABC's Women's Session and forwarded to Alice Paton which described the events at a regular suburban matinee. The writer had requested anonymity as her husband was connected with films.

> *... I was amazed to see that the theatre was filled with children of all ages, from pre-school tots to young teenagers. But I was even more amazed when I looked at the screen... It depicted a flashy nightclub with a scantily clad entertainer singing - 'My baby's so cold to me', or words to that effect, and illustrated by absurd contortions.*
>
> *The film then led on to an exchange of pleasantries between several unattractive and badly spoken members of the underworld, who gave weight to their words by waving automatics. I looked around at the audience and they all seemed bored and restless... Even the climax of a car chase between the goodies and the baddies, with much screaming of brakes and bullets whistling overhead failed to move them.*
>
> *I was told afterwards that this piece of dangerous nonsense was the weekly serial shown only at children's matinees. On inquiring what had happened to all those excellent children's films I heard were being produced in England, I learned they were not popular and therefore bad for business.*[8]

It also became apparent to the members of the VCCFT that children's film entertainment was of interest, not only in Australia and Britain, but also in many other countries.

Father (later Dean) Chamberlin of Melbourne wrote from Rome after attending a meeting of the 'Office Catholique, International Cinema' in Lucerne that in Europe he had found wide interest in the subject, and also in the activities of the Victorian Council for Children's Films.[9]

It was information such as this, received during the first years of the Council's existence, which encouraged its members, and they felt rewarded when some of the commercial exhibitors in Victoria again showed interest in the films they were promoting.

But the commercial interest could only be fully exploited if a regular supply of films could be guaranteed, and even the Council found that because of the shortage it was difficult to plan programs for its own screenings each month. It was frustrating to find in 1952 that three new CFF features were being held in bond in Australia, simply because of non-payment of the tariff necessary to secure their release.[10]

This led to an Australia-wide campaign by the Council to have the duty on children's films abolished, and in June 1954, after correspondence and deputations to several Federal Government Ministers, Newman Rosenthal and Alice Paton appeared before the Tariff Board.[11]

They sought tariff relief based on the fact that children's films had less earning potential than those for adults, and because they believed it was important for children to see films designed especially for them. They were also interested in encouraging international co-operation to assist in the world-wide distribution of films made for children; it seemed unfair to deny 'good, healthy, wholesome' cinema to Australian children while suitable films were not made in their own country.[12]

The request for tariff relief was finally granted after Mary Field had talked to politicians in Canberra during her Australian visit in 1954. The Acting Minister for Trade and Customs, Senator Spooner, wrote to Mr. Rosenthal informing him of the conditions:

(a) a certificate be issued by the Commonwealth Film Censor that such films are specially suitable for juvenile entertainment;

(b) a declaration be made on the face of the entry that exhibition of such films will be restricted to children's sessions only and that such films will not be used for television; and

(c) such films have been produced by production units, companies or firms approved by the Minister as catering solely for juvenile motion picture entertainment.[13]

It was a limited concession but it was significant for being the first official government recognition in any country, of 'children's' films as a special category. A definition of children's films had been drawn up at a meeting of the Brussels Treaty Organisation in London during 1954 in an attempt to facilitate import and export around the world, but Australia was later credited with having taken the initiative with this.[14]

However, the lifting of the tariff in Australia, which eventually secured the release of the three films in February, 1955,[15] did little to resolve the long-term problem of film supply for the growing but scattered audiences in such a large country.

On completion only one copy of each CFF film was sent from England and, although by 1951 the acknowledgement of 51 programs had been received, the Council in Victoria considered BEF distribution of these films from Sydney was far from satisfactory. After a meeting with Mr. Rank and his overseas manager in London, Newman Rosenthal believed that an investigation would be undertaken to locate all the films in the country, and to find why Greater Union Theatres, in which Mr. Rank had a substantial shareholding, was not promoting them.[16]

But the difficulties remained. 'Bush Christmas' could not be found for a planned Christmas screening in Victoria in 1952 and generally the films, which were hired out in packages, were not put together as balanced programs. Independent exhibitors who indicated that they would be prepared to experiment with the films at their matinees were not prepared to commit themselves to the usual deal which required taking several titles at one time.[17]

Overall, special films for children held little appeal for the film distributors and exhibitors in Australia. They were more accustomed to handling packages of imported films designed to attract mass audiences and they worked in a very competitive environment, spurred on by such incentives as a 'Showmanship Award'[18] and Box Office Drives,[19] organised from their head offices in the United States and Britain.

Sometimes children received special attention when material from their supply of 'General Exhibition' films was promoted:

> *On the showmanship side: Hoyts-Ozone is making an all-out drive for kiddie patronage, heavily publicising the three-serial matinee programs at their suburban houses.*[20]

And promotional events were staged to coincide with school holidays. In December 1953, RKO and TAA combined for the promotion of the film 'Peter Pan'. Santa Claus arrived by aircraft to distribute gifts to more than a thousand children but:

> *... a small boy dressed as Peter Pan of the Walt Disney film (which is the Christmas attraction at the Capitol and four Hoyts suburban theatres) rather stole his thunder by popping out from cellophane wrappings in the plane to sing [to] the assembled some of the songs from the movie.*[21]

A few months later a 'feast of cartoons' was planned for school holidays in Melbourne. This included 'Tom and Jerry', projected for the first time in cinemascope. The children's radio personality Norman Swain (Billy Bouncer) made personal appearances at cinemas and ran competitions on his radio program 'to tie-in with the film shows'.[22]

And in November 1954, Hopalong Cassidy made a successful visit to Australia with his wife Tripalong. In Melbourne he was driven through 'a cheering mob of 60,000 people' on his way to a children's party at Myers. 'Hoppy' also visited the children at the Orthopaedic Hospital at Frankston and on Saturday afternoon he circled Albert Park Lake before 70,000 people.

As he left Melbourne airport:

> *Five hundred children, many of them with tears in their eyes, waved him goodbye. They fought to touch him as he walked slowly to the plane.*[23]

Occasions such as these, with high emotional appeal, were popular with both children and adults, but the programs they promoted - the cartoons, the musical fairy stories and the American 'kidult' westerns - provided a very narrow range of entertainment and information for children living in Australia.

The attention being given to the CFF films by some Australian adults in the 1950s highlighted two fundamentally different attitudes towards children and films. One was enthusiasm for programs specially designed to cater for the diverse interests and needs of children and the second, a view compatible with the mass audience aspirations of the American film industry, was explained by American Mrs. Marjorie D. Dawson's reply to Henri Storck's international survey.

Mrs. Dawson, responding on behalf of the Committee of the National Children's Film Library (USA), stated quite unequivocally that the Committee '... does not advocate the making of recreational films especially for American children above the age of eight.'[24]

Her organisation, which had been founded in 1946, supported the use of films distributed by companies of the Motion Picture Industry of America and the films members selected for children were chosen on the basis of 'educational, social, religious and/or moral significance'.[25] They had found westerns with simple stories were popular with American children from eight - 12 years, and any undue violence was removed. The committee, she claimed, was especially careful with violence, particularly any that could be readily copied by children, and so Indian torture using fire and rope would be censored, while a 'clean' fight between Indians and white men with guns and bows and arrows was acceptable. A large number of bodies did not seem to trouble the audiences (or the Committee).[26]

Cartoons, slap-stick, farce, burlesque and stirring adventures were all found to have appeal for young audiences but passionate love was removed as it engendered a variety of responses ranging from boredom to acute discomfort.[27]

Remarkably, boys who obviously enjoyed more violent forms of action than girls, were given preference when selections were made:

> *... it is the taste of boys that must be considered, since American boys are quite uninhibited in their expression of movie likes and dislikes. ...*
>
> *When boys of 8 to 12 are uninterested in a picture, there will be no opportunity for girls of the same age to enjoy it even if they should desire to do so. The sound track is silenced in the derisive male uproar.*[28]

For children under the age of eight Mrs. Dawson recommended 16 mm films designed for this age group, for non-theatrical showing. Otherwise:

> *... the child does not live in a 'special' world. He lives in an adult world and, from the age of eight on, he is accustoming himself to living in that world.*
>
> *When pictures are deliberately drained of adult backgrounds and implications, the world they create is an unreal one. It is narrowed, emasculated and distorted by oversimplification. Thus, to the American child, it does not ring true.*[29]

Mrs. Dawson then added a statement, one which could have been made by Mary Field herself:

> *Top writers, producers, directors and actors can create films with the necessary integrity, honesty and simplicity needed for children. But, a book or a film with these qualities possesses the same appeal for adults.*[30]

Neither side was likely to disagree with this last statement, least of all the members of the VCCFT, but where were the films of universal appeal which might replace those of adult sophistry to which Australian, and American, children were being exposed at an early age?

Alice Paton went overseas in 1953, and she gained further inspiration and new ideas.

In Britain she met Mary Field for the first time. She visited the Children's Cinema Clubs, and she made contact with the British Film Institute and other local and international film organisations. She viewed, and was excited by, films made by children in schools.

A day at the cricket at Lords presented her with the opportunity to ask the Chairman of the British Council, General Sir Roland Adam, if they had ever considered sponsoring the visit of a woman to Australia. The idea appealed to him, especially when she suggested Mary Field whom he knew, and whom he considered would be an ideal representative of her country.[31]

Mary Field arrived the following year and during September and October she visited all the Australian states, screening films and addressing public meetings with audiences from the Australian film industry, women's groups, film societies, educational institutions, and the legal and medical professions.

In Sydney the impressive and very well-qualified Mary Field, OBE, MA, Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Film Foundation Ltd., film producer, writer, member of the British Board of Film Censors, Chairman of the British Federation of Business and Professional Women, and Convener of the Film Section of the International Council of Women,[32] was entertained at a business lunch attended by 150 distributors and exhibitors from the local film industry.

In reporting the event 'Film Weekly' told of the opening address from the Managing Director of Greater Union, Mr. Norman Rydge, and of his praise for Miss Field's work, when he said that her children's pictures helped in creating fine citizens. He also commented on an honour that Miss Field, as a woman, had acquired since arriving in Australia; an honour that she shared with Mrs. Roosevelt. They were the only women to be entertained in Canberra by both the President of the Senate and the Speaker.

In reply, the astute Miss Field claimed another honour now due to her; that of being the only woman to be entertained in her own right by the film industry in Sydney. She then went on to describe the growth of the CFF and suggested that by encouraging children to develop an intelligent interest in film the industry was, in the long term, looking after its own interests.

She remarked, when responding to questions, that children's films had been inappropriately marketed in Australia in the past. To introduce them on a significant scale it was necessary to have special matinees for both children's and general audiences, and to maintain the continuity of film supply.[33]

The advice was unheeded and judging by later reports in the 'Film Weekly' Mary Field's greatest contribution to the needs of the local industry came during her visit to New Zealand. This occurred just after the release of a report on child delinquency, and front page headlines announced: 'Pix don't cause delinquency ... (SAYS MARY FIELD)'. The article then continued:

> *... every Australian motion picture exhibitor should keep a report somewhere handy in his office of Miss Field's comments on this ever-provocative subject that constantly rears its ugly head in the newspapers followed by the inevitable attacks on the M.P.I. in general.*[34]

Before Mary Field's visit BEF had indicated they were no longer interested in handling the Foundation's films, and for want of a better solution the VCCFT considered undertaking this with a separate organisation, Children's Films Pty. Ltd. It was discussed with Mary Field and with the Australian representative of J. Arthur Rank Ltd,[35] but Norman Rydge intervened and for a time BEF distribution continued.[36]

The films were now duty free, new titles were expected, and a group of very keen voluntary workers in Victoria was ready to use and promote them. But further difficulties arose when, following Mary Field's successful tour, other states wanted to set up their own children's film organisations, and with only one 35 mm print of each title all their programming requirements could not be met.

In 1953 and 1954 regular screenings had been held in Perth, Brisbane had its first screening in June 1955,[37] and as arrangements were also being made for screening in Hobart and Launceston it became imperative to acquire more films. But it was only when Hoyts also agreed to show the new titles that second prints were promised.[38]

In an effort to obtain the best possible programs for Melbourne a very persistent Alice Paton, who had succeeded Newman Rosenthal as President of the VCCFT, maintained regular contact with Gordon Ellis in Sydney, by letter and telegram.

He wrote to her following his attendance at the first commercial screenings of the CFF films in Hobart and Launceston in February 1956, promoted by the Tasmanian Council for Children's Films and Television (TCCFT):

> *People were turned away at both the opening performances despite the lack of enthusiasm by the Exhibitor, but the campaign put over by Mr. Perkins and his committee was an exceptionally good one and the press were very kind. I feel certain you would be very interested in Mr. Perkins' campaign, and [at] a request from you I am sure he would give you full details of it.*[39]

But there was little point in offering this sort of encouragement to the Victorians who had decided to cancel their March screening at the Union Theatre. BEF could offer them a choice of only two features, both of which had recently been screened, and the Council was determined, in the interests of its audiences, to maintain a policy of not showing repeats inside three years.[40]

Alice Paton knew that new CFF films were being made as she received information regularly from London on all the titles produced. But they were not automatically being sent out, and in desperation the VCCFT made an offer to BEF to pay part of the cost of air freight to get new titles into the country quickly. They were told they were not needed.[41] 'Poor Mr. Ellis, he tried so hard to help us', Lady Paton recalls,[42] but the customs, censorship and distribution systems in Australia were compatible with orderly marketing by an established industry. They were not set-up to satisfy the rather different needs of enthusiastic part-time amateurs attempting to introduce a new type of film to children (and adults) with monthly screenings.[43]

The 1955 decision by Hoyts to include CFF films in some of their programs helped, but subsequent newspaper publicity did not.

The 'Argus' announced the change with an eye-catching headline: 'GUN-TOTIN' BADDY SHOT OFF THE MATINEE' and a reporter went out to interview children at Hawthorn State School. Not surprisingly he found that the children, especially boys, said they wanted action in their films. Readers of the paper were then assured that cowboys and Indians and 'other blood and thunder' characters would still be seen.[44]

Other newspaper journalists, particularly the 'Age' film critic Colin Bennett, took the subject more seriously and he wrote frequently in support of the VCCFT in the belief that children deserved a better deal than they were getting.

> *'Anything will do for the kids' is a maxim which has held sway in the film industry far too long, particularly in this country.*
>
> *Britain and the East European countries at least try to make some films for children. Australia of course does not make them: it is loathe even to show them.*
>
> *The circuits say Mary Field's children's pictures do not pay their way. Then let us have some decent revivals of Disney, Bush Christmas, outdoor adventure, puppets, fantasy and the like.*[45]

But commercial interest in the regular screening of children's films was proving hard to sustain and Hoyts' second effort with the CFF titles was short-lived because, the exhibitors claimed, of the lack of supply.[46] Other sources of suitable material had to be found, not only to continue demonstrating possibilities to the commercial sector, but also for the VCCFT's own programs.

Alice Paton turned to Edwin Schefferle at the State Film Centre in Victoria. Together they 'scrounged' around for new material which was not easy to find, but fortunately the Union Theatre had both 35 mm and 16mm projection equipment and this increased the choices available to them.

Whenever possible a local production commenced the monthly programs as 'Scheff' considered it important for Australian children, exposed to so much film from American and British sources, to see films of their own country. This was usually a documentary-style short from the Department of the Interior made to promote aspects of Australian life to adult audiences and Scheff selected subjects he believed would be of interest to children.

Commercial material was more difficult to obtain. An MGM cartoon was frequently included, although there were always difficulties obtaining these because the Union Theatre was not classified as a commercial cinema. And Disney films were unavailable as they could not hired out for single programs.[47]

The feature was usually a CFF production lasting about an hour and if nothing was available, two episodes of a CFF serial would be edited and combined. Sometimes a 16 mm. print from the British Australian Central Film Bureau, a part-time business run by a school teacher, Mr. Dodson, had to be used when the 35mm version could not be obtained from BEF. As far as possible there was variety in the programs, and over a year the range of films was likely to include material produced in the USA, Britain, Canada, Japan, Australia, and some European countries.[48]

From 1950 to 1959, when she retired as President of the VCCFT, Alice Paton continued to use her very well-known persuasive powers to recruit volunteers who gained experience in selecting films and in running film shows for children. They continued to describe their monthly screenings as 'demonstration' screenings in the hope that others would be encouraged to follow their lead. Children's film clubs were started in some suburbs, usually screening in local halls with 16mm equipment but any interest from commercial organisations remained spasmodic. Hoyts tried for a while, and some independent exhibitors showed interest in the idea, but it was not sustained.

The shows at the Union continued to attract good audiences and profits were satisfactory. These, together with the revenue from the annual subscriptions of affiliated organisations and individuals, enabled the VCCFT to cover its administrative costs, and to contribute to the cost of Mary Field's travel within Australia. The VCCFT was also able to make a vital contribution to the formation of the ACCFT in 1957 when it assisted with the travel expenses of delegates from other states.

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[1] Barbara Falk, 'Some Parents - and Children's Films', 'Visual Aids Review', Vol. 1, No. 3, October, 1952, p. 14

[2] ibid, pp. 14-15

[3] Article by Professor Stout, 'Argus', 10/12/51

[4] Letters collected by Alice Paton in the 1950s

[5] Letter from F.M. Osborne, MP for Evans, N.S.W., 21/3/55

[6] Letter from A. Eldridge, Probation Officer of the Children's Court, 23/9/56

[7] Letter from C.G. Corke, 24/10/56

[8] Copy of letter sent to Alice Paton by Nance Donkin, 29/5/57

[9] Letters from Father Chamberlin, 10/6/51, 18/6/51 and 18/7/51

[10] VCCFT Third Annual Report, 1952-1953

[11] VCCFT Fourth Annual Report, 1953-54

[12] Paper on 'Application for Reduction of Tariff on Films Especially Produced for Children', c. 1953

[13] Letter, W.H. Spooner to Newman Rosenthal, 2/11/54

[14] CFF Third Report, 1955, p. 9

[15] Letter to the Hon. A.A. Calwell, MP, from the Controller-General, Dept. Trade and Customs, 10/2/55

[16] Letter, Newman Rosenthal to Alice Paton, 25/4/51

[17] Letter, Alice Paton to E. Welton, J. Arthur Rank Overseas Film Distributors Ltd., London, 13/7/53

[18] 'Film Weekly', 17/9/53

[19] 'Film Weekly', 12/11/53

[20] 'Film Weekly', 26/11/53

[21] 'Film Weekly', 10/12/53

[22] 'Film Weekly', 2/9/54

[23] 'Film Weekly', 25/11/54

[24] Henri Storck, 'The Entertainment Film for Juvenile Audiences', UNESCO, Paris, 1950, p. 151

[25] ibid, p. 151

[26] ibid, p. 237

[27] ibid, p.129

[28] ibid, p.160

[29] ibid, p.155

[30] ibid, p. 156

[31] Jill Morris, Interview with Alice Paton, 7 and 10/2/83

[32] 'Visual Aids Review', Vol. 1, No. 6, July, 1954

[33] 'Film Weekly', 30/9/54

[34] 'Film Weekly', 14/10/54

[35] VCCFT Annual Report, 1953-54

[36] Letter, Gordon Ellis, BEF, to Alice Paton, 2/12/54

[37] Letter, Gordon Ellis to Alice Paton, 27/6/55

[38] Letter, Catherine King to Alice Paton, 8/11/55

[39] Letter, Gordon Ellis to Alice Paton, 6/3/56

[40] Letters, Gordon Ellis to Alice Paton, 6/3/56 and Alice Paton to Catherine King 13/3/56

[41] Letter, Alice Paton to Catherine King, 13/3/56

[42] Betty Rankin, Interview with Alice Paton, 6/9/83

[43] Correspondence between Alice Paton and BEF, Sydney, 23/11/54 - 11/3/58

[44] 'Argus', 2/12/55

[45] 'Age', 28/12/57

[46] VCCFT Minutes of Annual Meeting, 6/8/57

[47] Betty Rankin, Interview with Edwin Schefferle, 5/4/84

[48] Interview with Edwin Schefferle, and VCCFT lists of films screened 1957-1959

Chapter 4

Film Censorship and Children's Television

Despite the intention of its early members to concentrate on the positive side of children's film-going by encouraging the use of selected films, the VCCFT became a focal point for community concern over the system of film censorship and classification in Australia which was advisory only.

This had unfortunate repercussions for the organisation as the lobbying for legislation to prevent children from attending films classified for adults provoked opposition from members of the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association, the very people whose co-operation they were seeking.

And at the political level, they gained no support whatever from the minister responsible for censorship in Victoria, the Chief Secretary, Mr. (later Sir) Arthur Rylah. He maintained that it was impossible for exhibitors to determine the age of a child and with reference to experience between 1926 and 1932 he claimed that legislation placing the onus on exhibitors for excluding children from films was unworkable. It had to be withdrawn in 1932 because of opposition from their parents.[1]

The censorship issue came to a head in July 1955, when the American film, 'The Blackboard Jungle' was screened in Melbourne. Mr. Rylah agreed to receive a deputation of representatives from the VCCFT together with Mr. Ramsay, the Director of Education, Mrs. Breen, President of the National Council of Women, Mr. (later Professor) Frederick, Headmaster of Wesley College, Mr. Brown, Director of the Church of England Youth Organisations and Father Chamberlin, Director of the Catholic Youth Organisations and a member of the VCCFT. They sought an overhaul of the state censorship laws, and the enforcement of film classifications, with exhibitors taking the responsibility for refusing to admit children to films classified for adults.[2]

The event attracted the attention of the press and with headlines: 'Experts say ban Blackboard Jungle',[3] and 'Save the child pleads film critic',[4] the debate became confused, with emphasis placed on banning the film, rather than on the introduction of enforceable legislation to prevent children from seeing it.

Nothing changed, and the issues of film violence and censorship remained, to be raised many times in the 1950s, not only by members of the VCCFT, but also by the wider community[5] and by the press.[6]

Another subject which attracted wide interest in the 1950s was the introduction of television to Australia, and in March 1952, four years before the first telecasts began, a special meeting was planned by the members of the children's film council to add 'Television' to its name.[7]

By chance it was only six days before this that the Australian government had decided, because of adverse alterations to the balance of overseas payments, that the impending introduction of television would be deferred.[8] It meant that when a Royal Commission began its inquiries 12 months later the VCCFT was prepared with a brief submission.

In preparing its submission the VCCFT was assisted by a 'Report on Television' compiled by a sub-committee of the Victorian Women Graduates' Association (VWGA). Enid Shann, a former teacher, had convened a sub-committee to work on the report and it included contributions from VWGA members Mrs. G. Coalstad, Miss A. Hyde, Miss J. Lawson, Dr. D. Officer and Mrs. E. Tipping. They had gathered information from American and English sources and they commented on the medium as it appeared likely to affect their particular professions and interests, which included social work, children's radio, and paediatrics.[9]

The report predicted that the social impact of television in Australia was likely to enormous, but it would not necessarily be harmful. In both Britain and America some excellent programs were shown for children and adults, although America appeared to have problems with a proliferation of crime programs which, it was noted, was of concern to the American Medical Association. It was suggested that any problems arising from the medium would not be with television itself but in the way in which it could be used. Therefore, in Australia, there was a need for:

> *An independent control board which should have adequate representation of women on it, not just one as is customary in this country. It is the mother's province to safeguard her family, so she should have a say in any influences that are likely to obtrude into her family circle.*[10]

Alice Paton and Barbara Falk, the Principal of Mercer House and an expert on child education, represented the VCCFT at the Royal Commission on Television in 1953 while the President of the Council, Newman Rosenthal, appeared in his role as Director of the Visual Aids Department at the University of Melbourne. Twenty-four other organisations and individuals from around Australia made submissions relating to children.[11]

It was a new and daunting experience for Alice Paton, particularly as her husband Professor (later Sir) George Paton, the Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University, had been appointed Chairman of the Commissioners.[12] The other commissioners were Mr. R. G. Osborne, chairman of Australia's broadcasting authority, the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, Mr. Colin Bednall, a newspaper editor from Queensland, the Honourable Robert Wilson, a member of the Legislative Council of NSW, Mr. Norman Young, an accountant from SA, and Mrs. Maude Foxton, described as a 'Married Woman' of Kalgoorlie, WA.[13]

In its submission the VCCFT adopted a family-centred approach to television and offered specific advice on the timing and scheduling of children's, family, and adult programs, suggesting that an interval of half an hour between the telecasting of family and adult programs would give a clear indication to both children and parents that children's viewing time had ended. Specific ideas for programs were listed and included:

> *Adventure stories where children are the main characters. The children should be normal children, not stars or child prodigies.*
>
> *Stories of heroes of reality...*
>
> *Characters and incidents from books presented in such a way that children get the books and read them.*
>
> *Hobbies described in such a way that children will set to work to make things.*[14]

At the same time the Council was cautious, and advocated the need for a controlling body able to respond to any issues as they emerged.[15] Mrs. Falk and Mrs. Paton suggested that there should be some control over advertising in children's sessions to ensure that 'only appropriate and truthful methods of advertising were used.'[16]

On the 'business' side, a belief in the need for good children's programs was also expressed to the commissioners by W. Dunstan, General Manager of the Herald and Weekly Times:

> *Australia will be able to avoid the weaknesses and failures of early children's programmes in other countries, and commercial operators with a proper sense of responsibility will certainly do their utmost to ensure that, when it comes to children, nothing but the best will do.*[17]

This sounded promising although Alice Paton had pointed out when giving oral evidence that the experience of her Council with children's films indicated that the interests of commercial organisations were not necessarily compatible with the entertainment needs of children.[18]

The concept of controlling television transmission time, which had been proposed by the VCCFT, was, for a variety of reasons, also suggested by other witnesses. Some said it would be necessary to assist the development of program quality, others advocated a break, which was the practice in Britain, to give time for participation in family activities and responsibilities. But this was not acceptable to advertisers, advertising agencies or to potential licensees, and a majority of commissioners agreed with them. Only two, the Chairman and Mrs Foxton, recorded their dissent.[19] They both expressed the view that a break for one hour at the end of children's time should be compulsory, and that until program quality was demonstrated, transmission time should be limited to 30 hours per week.[20]

With regard for the needs of children, the commissioners recommended that national stations should provide regular age-specific material covering a wide range of children's interests. Recommendations for the commercial sector were less specific but commercial licensees were expected to make provision for children, which would be considered in a general assessment of performance at licence renewal times.[21]

These recommendations established guidelines for the subsequent development of television in Australia, but in one crucial area the influence of the commissioners had been pre-empted.

Arguments put by some of the witnesses for the gradual introduction of television, starting with a national station as in Britain, were prominent during the inquiry, but the commissioners perceived their terms of reference as limited in this respect. The legislation for the introduction of television had already been passed in Federal Parliament and they believed it gave clear indication that Australia would have a 'dual' (i.e. national and commercial) television system, as in radio broadcasting.[22]

The first commercial licences were granted in Sydney and Melbourne and, after consultation with the new licensees, program and advertising standards were drawn up by the Australian Broadcasting Control Board (ABCB). Under the Broadcasting and Television Act, 1942-56, the commercial licensees were expected to conform to these.[23]

Specific recognition was given to children under standards for general programs, standards for family programs, standards for programs made specially for children, and in standards for advertising. Recommendations were made for children's sessions designed to impart a knowledge of Australian history and current affairs; to foster an appreciation of the arts; to encourage interest and active participation in simple scientific investigations; and with examples from the Bible, and from history, biography and literature, to foster an appreciation of spiritual values and qualities of courage, honour and integrity, 'which are essential to the full development of the individual and of national greatness'.[24] Recommendations were also made for programs designed to encourage children's interests in sport and hobbies.

Imported programs for commercial channels were to be classified by the Film Censorship Board and locally produced material by the channels themselves. Classifications were related to the times at which programs could be shown.[25]

The standards appeared to be satisfactory but VCCFT members knew from their knowledge of audience research in America and Britain that children were avid viewers of all types of television programs, and they had no reason to believe that Australian children would be any different.

Enid Shann's interest; which had been stimulated by the VWGA Report, grew. She joined the VCCFT, and she was appointed the convener of a standing committee on television for the National Council of Women of Victoria. When it was established she was also appointed to the first ABCB Children's Advisory Committee with another VCCFT member, Pat Loftus, the Public Relations Officer of the Victorian Association of Youth Clubs.

The American experience with television, particularly with regard to children, did not appear to be one to emulate, therefore in 1956 when transmission by the four first commercial channels was about to begin in Sydney and Melbourne, and the large scale importation of American programs seemed likely, VCCFT members became concerned.[26]

They invited Keith Cairns, the General Manager of HSV7, to be the guest speaker at a meeting in August 1956.

The minutes of this meeting describe a demonstration of television with a program transmitted directly from HSV7 to the lecture theatre, and a discussion of the channel's plans for children. The first major offering was to be the American 'Mickey Mouse Club', and the channel was looking for a compere for a live studio program which would include handicrafts and arts, and other subjects of interest to children. Mr. Cairns indicated that live telecasts using Australian talent would occupy 45% of all transmission time, and this would increase with transmission hours. Family programs would run from 5.30 p.m. to 9 p.m.; a time-slot that would include programs suitable for children from 5.30 p.m. to 7 p.m.[27]

But Australian expertise was limited, and the quality of local productions did not match that of the drama series and situation comedies from the United States which immediately attracted the largest audiences.[28]

The VCCFT continued gathering information, largely from research reports and articles published in Britain and America, and members found themselves again in demand as speakers. This time the interest came from women's organisations, Rotary Clubs, medical and hospital groups, church groups and the parent groups of kindergartens and primary schools, as some members of the public attempted to evaluate the effects of the new phenomenon.[29]

In 1956 Enid Shann was invited to address the audience at the Melbourne Film Festival. She spoke first about the films seen by children:

> *... violent films are not the only danger. More insidious and yet just as destructive to the young mind is the glorification of false patterns of life. Many films concern themselves with a world where social values and responsibilities are unknown, and continual exposure to such attitudes undermines the child's social sense, and gives him false values about what is worthwhile in life.*[30]

She added that with the introduction of television children would be seeing films in their own homes every day which meant a new responsibility for parents - that of supervising their viewing. It also meant a new responsibility for the public - to expect the best, and she quoted from Gilbert Seldes, an American commentator on the mass media:

> *Television will have an effect on your lives even if you never own a television set and never hear a broadcast ... The fact is the one child who does not see horror programmes lives and will live in the world created by fifty who do.*[31]

In its first report on television the ABCB indicated satisfaction with programs in general, but added:

> *The Board is not yet, however, satisfied that all programmes televised during the Family and Children's Programme period comply fully with the spirit of special conditions which apply to them.*[32]

There was limited 'family' material available and the Censorship Board had been very busy making cuts to 730 films imported for television, usually to remove scenes of excessive violence from those intended for use between 5 and 7.30 p.m.[33]

The VCCFT reacted, complaining about the large number of American series which, despite the cuts, featured crime as a major theme. Letters were sent to Keith Cairns at HSV7 and to Colin Bednall, who had been appointed Manager of GTV9. From its own experiences with film the Council was familiar with the problems associated with the shortage of entertainment programs for children and so channel 7 was commended for programs such as the 'Judy Jack Show', the 'Mickey Mouse Club', 'Comedy Time', 'Father Knows Best', and 'Disneyland'. Channel 9 received praise for its hour-long live children's show, but both channels were severely criticised for the proliferation of American westerns.[34]

> *... although these have been censored here their main themes are still crime and violence, while they contain little of positive value. The monotony of their themes is stultifying to a child's imagination ... It is argued that many children enjoy these sessions, but we consider the evidence in both U.S.A. and Great Britain indicates this is only because they have not been offered anything better.*[35]

Initially the committee appointed by the ABCB to advise on children's programs showed some sympathy for the commercial needs of the television industry. It agreed with the Board's objectives:

> *... to secure, among other things, that television programmes in sessions designed for children, or which children are likely to see, should be of such quality that children will be not only entertained, but will derive positive benefits from these programmes.*

But it also noted:

> *On the other side of the picture, the Committee appreciates that by its very nature, the commercial element of Australia's television system has as a main objective the recouping of considerable capital outlay and the obtaining of a reasonable return on that capital in the interests of shareholders.*[36]

Two years later, as its knowledge and experience with television increased, the attitude of the Committee appears to have hardened. It reported that there had been some improvements in programs for children, and those shown when children were expected to be viewing, but it also reported that:

> *We have been informed of the experience of programme contractors to the Independent Television Authority in the United Kingdom, and we are impressed by their apparent willingness to plough back much of their profits into the provision of programmes which, though commercially unprofitable, are regarded as being aesthetically and morally valuable. We believe that the Board should watch carefully the performance of Australian commercial television stations in this regard, to ensure that the privilege of a licence is fully appreciated, together with its inherent obligations to use television constructively for the welfare of the community, and that it is not regarded merely as a permit to make profits for shareholders.*[37]

In commenting on the need for local material for Australian children the Committee suggested that licensees should experiment with programs which would encourage 'the spirit of Tom Sawyer', and introduce 'stories of Australian pioneering, to establish in young minds an Australian tradition and offset the infiltration of American pioneering history'.[38]

The Chairman of the Advisory Committee, Professor Frederick, added a personal letter to Mr. Osborne, the Chairman of the ABCB, with a document giving reasons for the Committee's criticisms, and he added:

> *... observation suggests that in the field of children's interests, as in other parts of the programme each commercial channel is acutely aware of its competitors, and that, almost always, business interests outweigh the goodwill and high purpose which those who operate the stations would, we believe, wish to demonstrate if they could do so without the risk of commercial loss. ... it may reasonably be expected of them (the stations) that they exercise their enormous influence responsibly, respecting standards and supporting the endeavours of the schools, even if this means a reduction in profits.*[39]

But the commercial channels were allowed to forge ahead unchallenged, readily attracting viewers of all ages, and leaving the government funded ABC way behind.

Enid Shann described its early progress with programs for children in her 1957 Report to the VCCFT: one live program, 'Stories of Jesus' once a week, 'Kindergarten Playtime' for half an hour on Thursdays, and BBC films 'Andy Pandy' and 'Muffin the Mule' for pre-school age children. The rest, she reported, were films, some of a documentary type, 'but they also enter the "shoot-em-up" field!' She hoped that their attempt to create a television version of the popular radio program 'The Argonauts' would prove successful.[40]

> *We have given a great deal of thought to the problem of films for children on T.V. The T.V. film industry definitely needs a Mary Field! The American half hour films shown here have not moved far beyond the western, jungle type so familiar on the Saturday matinee. We feel a diet of these on seven days a week is doing nothing to develop film appreciation in Melbourne children, and that the lessons Miss Field has learnt and put into practice in C.F.F. productions will need to be mastered by T.V. film makers.*[41]

But the experienced Mary Field, who became supervisor of children's programs for the British ABC-TV, and Associated Television Ltd. in January 1959 at the age of 64 years, was defeated by television.

She never again had the same opportunity to develop programs for children as that presented to her by J. Arthur Rank and the British film industry.[42]

Australia did not have a Mary Field, nor did it have a J. Arthur Rank with the inspiration, the money and the exhibition outlets which enabled special programs to be produced and screened for children. And Australia did not have a large pool of experienced people ready to make adult programs, let alone programs for young audiences.

But the idea of programs for children had found support from some adults throughout Australia, and it continued to grow.

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[1] 'Age', 16/7/55 and 16/5/57, 'Herald', 15/5/57, 'Sun', 16/5/57

[2] VCCFT Annual Report, 1954-55

[3] 'Sun', 16/7/55

[4] 'Argus', 16/7/55

[5] Letters to Alice Paton

[6] ACCFT press cuttings

[7] Notice of Special Meeting for 18/3/52

[8] Report of the Royal Commission on Television, Chairman, Professor George Paton, 1954, p. 12

[9] Betty Rankin, Interview with Enid Shann, 19/9/84 and 'Report on Television', VWGA Sub-Committee TV Report, April, 1953

[10] 'Report on Television', VWGA Sub-Committee TV Report, 16/4/53

[11] Report of Royal Commission, 1954, p. 38

[12] Betty Rankin, Interview with Alice Paton, 6/9/83

[13] Report of Royal Commission, 1954, p.5

[14] Royal Commission on Television, 'Evidence Offered by the Victorian Council for Children's Films and Television', 1953, No. 21

[15] ibid

[16] Report of Royal Commission, 1954, p. 100

[17] Royal Commission on Television, Submission by the 'Herald' and 'Weekly' Times, p. 13

[18] Royal Commission, Transcript of Evidence, 20/3/53, p. 377

[19] Report of Royal Commission, 1954, pp. 82-85

[20] ibid, p. 103

[21] ibid, p. 41

[22] ibid, pp. 9-10

[23] ABCB, Television Program Standards, 1/7/56, p. 3

[24] ibid, p. 9

[25] ibid, pp. 9-10

[26] VCCFT Sixth Annual Report, 1955-56

[27] Report of talk by Keith Cairns in Minutes of VCCFT AGM, 2/8/56

[28] ABT Report, 'Television in Australia: Its History Through the Ratings', 1980, pp. 21-22

[29] Betty Rankin, Interview with Enid Shann, 19/9/84

[30] Enid Shann, Lecture at the Melbourne Film Festival, 1956

[31] ibid

[32] ABCB Ninth Annual Report, 30/6/57, p. 40

[33] ibid, p. 41

[34] VCCFT letters to Keith Cairns and Colin Bednall, 9/8/57

[35] VCCFT letter to Colin Bednall, 9/8/57

[36] First Report of the Advisory Committee on Children's Television Programmes, Melbourne, August, 1957 - Enid Shann's papers, Minutes and Correspondence, 1950s to 1960s, Melbourne University Archives

[37] Second Report of the Advisory Committee on Children's Programmes to the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, Melbourne, June, 1959 - Enid Shann's Papers, Melbourne University Archives

[38] ibid

[39] Letter, Professor Frederick to Mr. Osborne, 1959 - Enid Shann's papers, Melbourne University Archives

[40] VCCFT Seventh Annual Report, 1956-57

[41] ibid

[42] Betty Rankin, Interview with Henry Geddes, June, 1984

Chapter 5

A National Network Develops

Mary Field's visit to Australia in 1954 served to provide a link between people in the geographically divided Australian states.

In the west she found that an organisation, the Western Australian Association for Children's Films, was already holding regular screenings of her films. The Adult Education Board in Perth had arranged these in response to requests from parents and members of children's organisations, and in 1953 over 2,000 children had attended the first program shown at Perth's Capitol Theatre.[1] In 1954, with the Adult Education Board taking responsibility for finance and administration, the successful experiment was repeated.[2]

Behind these events was a very well-known Perth woman, Catherine King, who conducted the ABC Women's Session in her state. Like Alice Paton, Catherine King was deeply interested in the welfare of children, and was also very active in community affairs. In 1942 when the kindergartens in Perth closed because of the war with Japan and the fear of an attack, she had persuaded the ABC's Con Charlton to try a daily radio program for young children in their homes. This marked the beginning of the very successful 'Kindergarten of the Air', a program which became a regular feature of ABC radio in all states of Australia, and on the BBC in Britain, where it was given the title of 'Listen With Mother'.[3]

Later, while living in London, Catherine King studied Mary Field's work with children's films, and on her return to Perth she founded the local children's film organisation.[4]

When Mary Field arrived the screening of children's films in and around Perth was going 'strangely well'. Fortnightly matinees in the city were attracting 600 to 700 children and adults, which was a marked fall from the first attendance figures, but local distribution had increased, and the films were also being shown in most suburbs.[5]

Mary Field was impressed and she reported to Bill Perkins in Tasmania:

> *In Western Australia the Council has been peculiarly successful as members have guaranteed audiences for special shows of children's films and there are now over thirty cinemas around Perth showing these films regularly.*[6]

It was encouraging to learn of these activities but communication between the states remained very limited and Catherine King wrote to Alice Paton:

> *We long to know what is happening on the other side of Australia, but fully understand that it would be a great chore for anyone to sit down and write the whole story to us.*[7]

In November 1955 Catherine King visited Victoria and reported on the 'whole-hearted' co-operation of both the film distributors and exhibitors in her state.[8] BEF's representative in Perth, Fred Crouch, was particularly helpful but his assistance was limited by the number of films available for distribution in his region. Therefore, while in Sydney, Catherine King saw Gordon Ellis to reinforce Alice Paton's pleas for second prints. She reported back: 'They have a tremendous admiration and liking for you, so you can cash in on that with gusto.'[9] But it was Hoyts' agreement to use the films which finally influenced BEF's decision to import the extra prints.

A year later, when her husband took Sabbatical leave, Catherine King accompanied him to England and although she continued to work for the welfare of children through the United Nations she lost touch with children's films. The children's film organisation she had established survived, but was hampered in its ability to continue promoting children's films as they gradually disappeared from the state.

Other states had different experiences. In South Australia the interest in children's films evolved from one of the activities undertaken by members of the National Council of Women of South Australia. As a guide for parents they had established a Film Endorsement Unit in 1942, and a school teacher, May Mills, was responsible for the 40 members of the unit who worked in pairs to provide assessments of all films shown at weekly matinees. Their recommendations were published in the 'Advertiser' and were sometimes used as a guide by exhibitors when making up their programs.[10]

But industry response was limited and the women's assessment unit failed to overcome the much criticised anomaly of films for general exhibition being shown with those of other classification categories.[11]

After contact with Alice Paton in April 1951, South Australians learnt of the children's films being shown in Victoria,[12] and later that year an article in the Adelaide 'Advertiser' reported on the visit of Mrs. Durston, a member of the VCCF. It described her enthusiasm for the successful demonstration screenings in Victoria, and of 35 Hoyts suburban theatres showing the Rank children's films for the first time.[13]

The South Australians were impressed and although an attempt to establish a children's film council similar to the one in Victoria failed, children's films and television became a major interest for the existing South Australian Council for Films and Television (SAFTC). In its early years this council, under President Sir Herbert Mayo and Vice-Presidents, Miss May Mills and Professor Jeffares, had instigated the renewal of the State Documentary Film Committee. Through May Mills and her Film Endorsement Unit its interest in children's films and television developed.[14]

The first attempts to obtain and screen the Rank films in Adelaide were unsuccessful. Members of the local film trade noticed and asked:

> *... what's happening to those Rank kiddie programs the Film and TV Council was planning to put into the Melba last September-12 months? Apparently the hold-up on the films has held up pretty solidly.*[15]

The situation improved after Mary Field's well-publicised visit and 'Circus Boy' was shown at three suburban theatres on the Odeon circuit. With the help of the Country Women's Association the film was sent to the country, but:

> *Just when the women all over the country were becoming insistent on having 'Circus Boy' for their country towns, BEF spirited it away, out of circulation to Perth! This was Dec/54. After ten months BEF produced CFF 'Stolen Plans' and 'Secret Cave' to be released here in Oct. at 16 suburbs. Just when we seemed to be at a dead-end NCW President Mrs. Lipman called on Miss Field in London and put a case on our behalf. Within days BEF announced the above!*[16]

Once the films were available, exhibitors on the Odeon circuit used them, but uncertainty about the continuity of supply remained.[17]

Existing differences between sections of the community and local film exhibitors marred early attempts to encourage the screening of children's films in Queensland. In 1953 the Motion Picture Exhibitor's Association of Queensland was not happy with criticism it had received and responded by issuing an invitation to 'prominent women's organisations' to discuss the effect of films on children. One exhibitor challenged the women by offering them a theatre for Saturday morning matinees and added:

> *... if people accusing picture theatres of being resorts for breeding child delinquents and youthful criminals were to analyse the present and past states of society, they would find two fundamental causes for youthful crime: alcohol and gambling by adults.*[18]

However, the interest in children's films went beyond that of the 'women's organisations' and a Queensland Council for Children's Films and Television already existed when Mary Field arrived in

1954. For a time it seemed that past differences with exhibitors might have been resolved as her presence 'put new life into the children's film movement in Brisbane'[19] and, much to his surprise, the secretary of the local MPEA, Eddie Heindorf, found that he was impressed by Mary Field and her attitude towards the provision of films for children.[20]

In its first Newsletter the QCCFT emphasised Mary Field's positive attitude towards film[21] and in a letter to Newman Rosenthal the President, Professor Ringrose, expressed renewed optimism with members 'anxious to provide good entertainment for children irrespective of their views on other matters.'[22] But the first QCCFT failed to survive, and when the inaugural meeting of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television was held in 1957, Queensland was the only state not represented.

Attempts to revive Queensland interest in children's films began in 1960 after a newcomer, Hilda Symonds, cinema convener for the National Council of Women in Queensland, wrote to Senator Nancy Buttfield. She had read a newspaper report of her visit to the National Centre of Films for Children in Brussels and she wanted information as she was disappointed in the lack of films for children in her new state.[23]

Alice Paton replied expressing her hope that Queensland, as the only state not represented, might renew its interest in children's films and join the national body.[24] But Queenslanders were not interested. Professor Ringrose had died and Hilda Symond's university friends, aware of the difficulties he had experienced with divisive council members, were not encouraging. Finally, a 'stormy' meeting of about 70 people was held, with wary representatives of the film industry and the recently introduced television industry, in attendance.

> *They all felt we wanted to set ourselves up as censors and that our criticisms would be negative. I think I played my biggest role in the Council that night when I convinced the meeting that our Council would be a positive Council, not a destructive one.*[25]

A year later, after energetic lobbying by Hilda Symonds and Clare Curnow, a member of St. Joan's Alliance, the inaugural meeting of the new QCCFT was held and Judge D.G. Andrews, an acceptably 'neutral' figure, was elected president.[26] A Constitution similar to that of the other states was adopted, but in a bid to avoid the divisiveness of the past, the Queenslanders felt it necessary to introduce a carefully worded 'preamble' which recognised the differences and complexities of 'the modern mixed society'.[27]

New South Wales got away to an early start with the Rank children's films as some were shown in suburban cinemas in 1949, but the large commercial circuits showed no interest in them.[28] The intelligent interest in film which Mary Field sought to develop in young audiences does not seem to have been one of their aspirations, or a part of their experience:

> *Records are expected to go by the board at the Esquire Theatre when Walt Disney's 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' is revived there for the school children's term holidays at the end of the month.*
>
> *The film created a riot when it was revived in Sydney not so long ago. The Esquire is already reinforcing its doors in anticipation.*[29]

At the time of Mary Field's visit to Sydney a report in the 'Sydney Morning Herald' expressed the hope that NSW would follow the lead with children's films set by other states,[30] but Mary Field's advice to those at the centre of the film trade in Australia appears to have had little impact. It was community organisations who responded.

Members of the National Council of Women of NSW held screenings at the University, the Public Library and in schools, and after finding children enjoyed their films decided to establish their own children's film council.

Twenty-five organisations, including the 'large and important' Parents and Citizens Associations, joined initially[31] and in 1959 the New South Wales Council for Children's Films and Television (NSWCCFT) reported a membership of one delegate from each of 39 fully affiliated organisations. It was an impressive start but NSWCCFT members appear to have given priority to holding public meetings and reviewing the standard of programs screened at children's matinees rather than attempting to arrange their own screenings. They expressed delight with the commercial release of CFF features in March 1958, when the films were screened 'very successfully' at over 70 Sydney suburban theatres[32] but, as in other states, this commercial interest was short-lived.

In the small island state of Tasmania the regular screening of children's films was rapidly and very successfully introduced, because of the unmitigated enthusiasm and knowledge of one man, Bill Perkins. Bill Perkins was a senior lecturer in Education at the University of Tasmania, and President of the Australian Council and Tasmanian Federation of Film Societies. The work of Mary Field inspired him:

> *The main purpose of Miss Field's films is to provide the most suitable film entertainment for children between the ages of 7 and 13. All the films have unaffected child actors with whom children in the audience can identify themselves; they are free from horror and brutality; they are notable for their spirit of adventure*

> *(without any frightening scenes); and they present to children ideals of kindliness, tolerance, healthy zest for living and goodwill.*[33]

After meeting Mary Field in Hobart in 1954 Bill Perkins was eager to start showing her productions. He was not unduly concerned about involving commercial exhibitors as he was quite accustomed to running an adult film society. If it meant getting started he was quite prepared to establish junior film societies and use 16 mm film to overcome the difficulties of 35 mm distribution. Before any organisation had been established in Tasmania, he wrote to Mary Field:

> *... the main function of our Tasmanian organisation will be, not to talk about the films or deplore the present children's programs, but to arrange as many screenings as possible as soon as sufficient a number of your films is available.*[34]

Bill Perkins maintained regular contact with Mary Field in London, keeping her informed of progress in Tasmania and, at her suggestion, providing comments on her films and the reactions of Tasmanian children.[35]

Like Scheff, he was very keen to introduce Australian-made films to his programs and he wrote to Stanley Hawes, Producer-in Chief of the Film Division of the Department of the Interior:

> *There is already a vast amount of material for short supporting films among the many documentaries you have produced over the years. Most of these, especially those in colour, are superior to the CFF shorts now being screened as supports to their features. Many of your documentaries, especially those featuring children, could be used as they are; others could possibly be adapted for children's programs.*[36]

He went on to describe the difficulties confronting anyone in Australia who attempted to put together a full program for children:

> *One of the most frustrating aspects of arranging complete children's programs is the fact that suitable films (both shorts and features) are held by so many different distributors. At present we have almost exhausted BEF's list, and I am trying to draw up programs from the other companies. Then we come up with the fact that some exhibitors don't have contracts with some distributors etc. etc.*[37]

Finally, he offered a solution which was to motivate and inspire others over many years:

> *In 20 years time, perhaps, we'll have one big library of all the children's films, and also an Australian CFF producing features and documentaries for Australia and overseas.*[38]

Bill Perkins had previously suggested to Mary Field that children's films might be made in Australia and she responded:

> *... no one except the Foundation is likely to finance them, as there is no money in children's films. However, if the terms of reference of the Australian National Film Board could be adjusted so that they could co-operate with us, providing technicians and equipment, while we provide the story and 'know how' together with a director, I believe we could produce some first-class Australian children's films for you.*[39]

When approached with this idea members of the National Film Board were hesitant, although both Kevin Murphy, the Director-General of the Department of the Interior, and Stanley Hawes felt that collaboration with the British organisation would come under their existing terms of reference which included the favourable promotion of Australia to overseas countries:

> *If we encouraged films, of the type which the Foundation produces, with an Australian background, we should be developing familiarity with this country among very receptive audiences of children throughout a number of countries.*[40]

However the CFF was not yet ready to commit itself to further overseas productions.

> *... we have another grant of £125,000 for next year and some very nice serial stories which should help attract your audiences and keep them.*[41]

This was small consolation to Bill Perkins, whose ideas and ambitions for children's films were growing. In June 1956, CFF films and the earlier productions from CEF were being shown commercially in 16 Tasmanian towns. But after the first series of 19 programs, the supply had run out and the theatres reverted to their normal features.[42]

The difficulties of maintaining regular screenings throughout Australia suggested the need for an Australia-wide organisation and this idea was canvassed by Bill Perkins.[43] Newman Rosenthal was doubtful as although Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria all had organisations with committed and active members, and some support from local exhibitors, the other states did not.

However, the expense of travel precluded the possibility of preliminary discussions and after an exchange of letters amongst all State Councils a meeting was convened by Alice Paton for March 1957 in Victoria.[44]

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[1] 'Film Weekly', 29/10/53

[2] 'Film Weekly', 15/7/54

[3] Betty Rankin, Interview with Catherine King, 12/11/84

[4] J. Lewis, 'On Air', Fremantle Press, p. 54

[5] Letter, Catherine King to Alice Paton, 15/10/54

[6] Letter, Mary Field to Bill Perkins, 12/11/54

[7] Catherine King to Alice Paton, 15/10/54

[8] VCCFT Annual Report, 1955-56

[9] Letter, Catherine King (from Sydney) to Alice Paton, 8/11/55

[10] 'School Post', August, 1956

[11] ibid

[12] Letter, D. Chettle to Alice Paton, 9/11/51

[13] 'Advertiser', 15/8/51

[14] SAFTC Report to the First Biennial Meeting of the ACCFT, May 1959 and History of the SAFTC, 1950-1971, May Mills, 24/6/71, unpublished

[15] 'Film Weekly', 23/10/53

[16] Letter, Cynthia Hurst to Newman Rosenthal, 28/10/55

[17] Letter, May Mills to Alice Paton, 6/4/56

[18] 'Film Weekly', 22/10/53

[19] Letter, D.J. Munro, Sec. QCCFT, to Newman Rosenthal, 20/11/54

[20] 'Film Weekly', 7/10/54

[21] QCCFT Newsletter No. 1, October, 1954

[22] Letter, Professor Ringrose to Newman Rosenthal, 8/12/54

[23] Letter, Hilda Symonds to Nancy Buttfield, 21/1/60

[24] Letter, Alice Paton to Hilda Symonds, 17/2/60

[25] 'Notes on the Formation of the QCCFT', Hilda Symonds, October, 1977

[26] Betty Rankin, Interview with Hilda Symonds, 5/10/83

[27] Minutes of meeting held in connection with the formation of the QCCFT, 31/7/61 and QCCFT Constitution

[28] 'Film', April, 1949

[29] 'Film Weekly', 20/8/53

[30] 'Sydney Morning Herald', 20/10/54

[31] Thelma Metcalfe to Alice Paton, 2/10/55

[32] NSW CCFT, Report for Biennial Meeting of ACCFT, May, 1959

[33] Bill Perkins, 'Tasmanian Education', August, 1954

[34] Letter, Bill Perkins to Mary Field, 29/9/54

[35] Letters, Mary Field to Bill Perkins, 26/5/56 and Bill Perkins to Mary Field, 13/6/56

[36] Letter, Bill Perkins to Stanley Hawes, 12/6/56

[37] ibid

[38] ibid

[39] Letter, Mary Field to Bill Perkins, 26/3/56

[40] Letter, Stanley Hawes to Bill Perkins, 25/5/56

[41] Letter, Mary Field to Bill Perkins, 21/6/56

[42] Letter, Bill Perkins to Mary Field, 13/6/56

[43] Letter, Bill Perkins to Alice Paton, 19/9/56

[44] VCCFT Executive Meeting Minutes , 25/2/57

Chapter 6

The ACCFT is Established

The decision to form a national organisation was made and the inaugural meeting of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television (ACCFT) was held on the 30th of March, 1957 in Melbourne. Lady Paton and Mr. H. McD. Shaw represented Victoria, Mrs. M. Padman and Mr. W. Perkins, Tasmania, Miss M. Mills, South Australia, and Mrs. F. Arnott and Mrs. Edgar, NSW. Mrs. King was overseas and Miss Edwards, a Western Australian teacher living in Victoria, represented her state.

Mrs. L. Matheson, the founder and secretary of the Children's Library and Crafts Movement in Sydney, and a member of the ABCB's Children's Advisory Committee, attended as an observer, and Mr. Rosenthal was present as an adviser.

At the meeting Lady Paton was elected President of the ACCFT with Mr. Shaw and Mr. Perkins Vice-Presidents. Mrs. N. Vaughan, a member of the VCCFT, was elected as honorary Secretary-Treasurer.[1]

The representatives from the states reported varying degrees of success. When they were available CFF films had been shown in commercial cinemas, on 16mm film at schools, or through junior film clubs. Tasmania, guided by Bill Perkins, was encouraging the latter form of exhibition. NSW reported very little success in establishing regular screenings of any sort.[2]

Several resolutions were made to provide guidelines for the future activities of the national body. Bill Perkins was to continue his efforts to have children's films produced in Australia; more prints of the CFF films were to be requested from BEF; and all state representatives agreed to investigate the effectiveness of advisory film classification, with a view to seeking regulations similar to those of New Zealand and Britain if necessary. The possibility of introducing a new classification to distinguish between films particularly suitable for children under 13 years of age, and those more suited to adolescents, was also to be explored. The states were asked to contribute information about films, both suitable and unsuitable, as they were screened.[3]

Sydney and Melbourne were the only cities to have begun television transmission and Mrs. Shann and Mrs. Matheson were invited to comment. They reported that some good programs had been shown but the overall standard for children was disappointing. Mrs. Shann recommended that study groups be set up to encourage the development of informed public opinion.[4]

The new Australia-wide organisation was acclaimed by film critic Colin Bennett who urged all parents to play a part in ensuring that children's films would continue.

> *The exhibitors are in the movie business as a business. They say they must give the public - children included - 'what they want' or go bankrupt; and the Rank films apparently did not attract as many as the normal Saturday programmes of cowboy or space adventures.*[5]

Mary Field was also delighted to hear about the new Council in Australia and she suggested making official contact with the International Centre of Films for Children (ICFC) in Brussels.[6] This link was to add a new 'professional' dimension to the children's film movement in Australia although at the same time it served to highlight the differences that existed between some of those employed in the film and television industries, and the multifarious critics of their programs. It was not a problem peculiar to Australia; it was well-known to the professional film-maker Mary Field:

> *Under pressure from adults, both in Europe and England, we have during this year, abandoned what the French call 'film policier' such as the 'Stolen Plans' and concentrated on films of achievement. The children enjoy these films immensely but the adults complain that they are dull! What are we to do?*[7]

But the CFF had a chance of appeasing its critics as it had the money, and with it the independence, to experiment in providing a variety of film programs for children. It also had the support of a well-established, confident and experienced film industry. In Australia it became an on-going problem as critics, both within and outside the industry, were numerous, and there was little money and few opportunities for local film-makers to gain experience.

The possibility of co-production between Australia and the CFF was raised again by the ACCFT, and this time Mary Field seemed more hopeful.

> *We have a company that would be willing to take the risk of an Australian production and who have a very good Australian director, ... It seems likely, therefore, that we at our end will be ready to consider any constructive suggestion that may come from the Australian National Film Board.*[8]

But although the Board in Australia expressed interest, and a willingness to co-operate, there was no immediate prospect that this would happen.[9]

The benefits of local production seemed obvious to the supporters of children's films, but it was equally clear that generating meaningful support amongst the wider community was going to be difficult. Alice Paton suggested approaching the politicians, the 'higher ups' she called them, as collaboration with the CFF was 'really a policy matter.'[10] She wrote to the Minister for the Interior, Allen

Fairhall, who was responsible for the Film Division of his Department. He expressed interest but could offer no immediate help.[11]

Finally, from Mary Field:

> *... unless we get an approach from Australia it is not likely, at any rate this year, that the Foundation would think of spending its money in Australia.*[12]

That was in 1957 and 1958, when as television transmission time increased in Australia, the dearth of entertainment made for children became even more pronounced.

The ACCFT tried again in 1959, and Senator Buttfield asked in the Senate about the possibility of co-production between the Commonwealth Film Unit and the CFF. She was told that commitments to producing material for national publicity and other government departments was too great.[13]

The Council turned to the commercial sector. The Shell Company of Australia was known to have a film production unit and so it was approached. However, it had a heavy schedule with shorts, some of which were considered suitable for children, and it was unable to consider the possibility of making features for children.[14]

Robert Lord, the Manager of Artransa Pty. Ltd., was asked for his advice, and he described the financial hazards of making films for children in Australia. Without some form of government assistance the risks were too great for any local production company. Artransa had made 26 half-hour programs in a series 'Animal Parade' (the first Australian children's television series on film) and the ABC had paid less than the series cost to produce. Costs were only recouped after versions had been made for the UK, USA, Canada, and for non-English speaking countries.

> *Almost any film can be made 'down to a price' but by adopting this approach, production values suffer ...*[15]

And low budget material was not what the ACCFT was looking for!

Frank Wells succeeded Mary Field as Executive Officer of the CFF and he explained that unlike CEF, which had been an independent body, the CFF had an obligation to the British film industry which funded it. Therefore, when co-productions were arranged with other countries, the country co-operating would be expected to contribute between one third and one half of the total of about £20,000 to £23,000 for a children's feature.[16]

The prospects were not looking good until the ACCFT thought it had finally found an ally in an Australian producer, Hector Crawford.[17] He was attempting to produce material for television locally, and was actively seeking government intervention to prevent the sale of American television programs which he claimed were being bought by the Melbourne and Sydney markets at 'dumped' prices ranging from £150 to £225 per episode.[18] Other countries including England, Canada, Japan, Italy and America all had protection against imported television programs so why not Australia, which was particularly vulnerable because of its large size and small population?[19] Mr. Crawford also believed that financial assistance was necessary, either from the government or from the commercial television channels, if Australian television producers were to have any real prospect of developing programs in the more expensive categories of drama and variety.[20]

He expressed concern for Australian children who lacked programs which might help to stimulate a 'consciousness of national identity and pride in our nation, and a regard for our own cultural ideas and patterns.'[21]

This concern was shared by others as the new commercial television industry in Australia responded to the widespread influence and marketing strategies of Americans. Alice Paton addressed the ACCFT on the subject. She was reported locally, in London, and in New York, where the 'New York Times' proclaimed under the headline: 'AUSTRALIAN T.V. AMERICANIZED', that Australian children saw little on their television screens other than the American scene, and heard little, other than American voices.[22]

Around this time a small number of cinema films, either for or about children, was actually being made in Australia. A British organisation, London Films, produced 'Smiley' in 1956 and two years later this was followed by a sequel, 'Smiley Gets a Gun'. And in 1958 a group of amateur Australian film-makers at Eltham in Victoria made 'The Prize'. Tim Burstall, using his family and neighbours as actors and crew, and with hired 35mm equipment, made a 60-minute black and white film about a boy and his goat.[23]. This film, with music composed by Dorian Le Gallienne, won a Bronze Medallion at the 1960 Venice Film Festival, but without the benefits of any organised distribution and exhibition outlets it had little chance of achieving any commercial success.

A few short films were attempted. One of interest to the ACCFT was a 16mm short in colour, 'Weekend at Cradle Mountain', made by Bill Perkins and fellow Tasmanian Charles Wolnizer in their spare time. The 20-minute adventure featuring children was located in Bill Perkins's beloved Tasmania and, after completion in 1960, it was sold to several film libraries.[24]

In 1960 Roger Mirams achieved success with television when he wrote and directed the drama series, 'The Adventures of the Terrible Ten', for Pacific Film Productions. This was shown in 10-minute weekly episodes on GTV9 over 12 months, rating a respectable 13.[25]

The ACCFT was quick to publicly praise the series, describing it in a letter published by the 'Age' as:

> *... very good entertainment provided by children for children at 6 pm on Sunday ... May we hope that many more of these episodes will be available to families at a time when city and country children may view them and participate in the fun.*[26]

But it survived only 12 months on commercial television. A second series, 'The Ten Again' was screened on ABV2 in 1962, where it rated only 3.[27]

A limited range of film and television programs for children was not peculiar to Australia, and affiliation with the ICFC brought to the members of the ACCFT a greater awareness of the problem.

The International Centre was established with the intention of bringing together two different groups; those concerned with making, distributing and exhibiting films, and others such as educationists and social workers, who were primarily concerned with the welfare of children. With assistance from UNESCO and the Belgian Government a home for the Centre was found in Brussels, and in March 1957, the organisation of 'professional' and 'non-professional' members was formally established with Mary Field as Chairman.[28]

The pre-requisite for 'professional' representation was included for in order to:

> *... favour the promotion of films for young people throughout the world, it is in the first instance essential to have the understanding and the co-operation of the professional circles of the cinema.*[29]

In Australia an amended ACCFT constitution was adopted at a special general meeting in 1958 and in addition to the two non-professional representatives from each State Council, a requirement was added for an equal number of members from:

> *... the film trade, the National Film Board, the State Film Centres, Film Censors, and other professional film interests...*[30]

This time the state representatives included Catherine King and South Australian, Senator Nancy Buttfield. 'Professionals' who attended were: Mr. C.J. Campbell, the Chief Film Censor, Mr. Stanley

Hawes from the National Film Board, Mr. David Swift from the State Film Centre in Victoria, Mr. A. Jepson of the Film Renters' Association and Mr. E.C. Hilyard from BEF. But the professional representation was limited and, although invited, a representative from the important Film Exhibitors' Association was not present.[31]

The ACCFT suggested that the supply of films for children in Australia might be enlarged with the preparation of 'confidential' lists of 'specially suitable' titles which would be available for the information of local exhibitors, as in Britain.[32]

Mr. Campbell was happy to play his part by noting any appropriate films as they passed through his hands but although in eight months he unofficially compiled a list of 30 titles, he believed they had very little entertainment value for children, and only two were full length features. And no importers indicated any interest in the idea.[33]

The situation in Australia was critical, and showed no signs of improving. During 1958, 463 feature films were admitted to the country; 219 were classified for general exhibition and more than half, 244, were considered not suitable for children. Cuts were made to 225 of the theatrical films, usually for excessive violence, and

> *... in many cases a cut was made with the consent of the importers to enable films to qualify for a general exhibition certificate.*[34]

Television was the same:

> *Most of the cuts made in 1,343 television films concerned excessive violence. Many cuts were made in the knowledge that the importers preferred certain of their film series to be granted a certificate permitting them to be televised in children's time rather than accept them intact but classified as not suitable for children.*
>
> *Television films which have crime in some form or another as their principal theme with its inevitable violence greatly exceed other types.*[35]

It was not surprising that the ACCFT found it difficult to establish a satisfactory working relationship with film and television personnel, and in the early days the professional members of the Council came from the Motion Picture Distributors' Association, British Empire Films, the Victorian State Film Centre (which represented similar organisations in the other states), the National Film Board, and the Australian Broadcasting Commission. For a time the Australian Film Institute and the Australian Film Producers' Association were also represented. The Chief Film Censor, and the Director of Program

Services for the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, Mr. D.A. Jose, attended meetings as observers. Some members were elected for specific purposes: Edwin Schefferle advised on films, and Enid Shann on television.[36]

Other countries displayed interest in the activities of the Council and Ceylon and South Africa inquired about the Australian system of importing children's films free of duty.[37] Dr. F. Rainsberry, the Supervising Producer of Children's Programs for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, also sought information about the children's film movement in Australia as he hoped that by encouraging similar support in his own country a National Film Foundation and distribution centre for children's films could be established.[38]

And when she travelled overseas again Alice Paton's experiences provided further insights for the Australians.

While in England in 1958 she arranged for the screening of an 'Australian' program at an International Presentation of Films for Young People at the 1958 World Fair in Brussels. As it was not possible for the International Centre to organise a formal occasion according to the rules set for adult film festivals, an informal presentation fulfilled the purpose of the event which was to undertake a survey of children's film programs, and assess the problems which existed internationally.[39]

Arranging an Australian contribution was not easy as there was not much to chose from, but the films were finally selected and located (either in Australia or England), and despatched to Brussels with accompanying technical specifications.[40]

The program was typical of those screened at the Union Theatre in Melbourne. It comprised two shorts, one from the CFF plus an earlier one from CEF, an MGM cartoon, and the only Australian production, a six-minute 1953 short from the Australian National Film Board. It was 'Down in the Forest', which showed kangaroos, koalas, native wild cats, cus-cus and possums. The feature chosen was the world famous 11-year-old CEF production, 'Bush Christmas'.

Nineteen other countries participated; Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Italy, Norway, Poland, Rumania, Spain, Switzerland, the USA, USSR, West Germany and Yugoslavia, and their films were shown to children and adults in four locations over five days.[41]

Britain was prominent with productions from the CFF, and of the other major film producing countries, India showed a documentary for very young children produced by the Indian Government, and an adventure film designed for adolescents. The USSR showed a newsreel, a cartoon designed for 6 -

16 year olds, and an adventure story for the age group 8 - 16 years, and the USA sent a cartoon, 'Little Toot', a short, 'Kids and Pets' (no ages given), and 'Gypsy Colt', a story film for 'very young children'.[42]

Alice Paton was unable to attend the screenings but Mary Field reported that very few of the films would have been of interest to Australian children.[43] On the other hand, Mrs. Elsa Marcussen, a children's film consultant from Norway, believed that some of the films had qualities of universal appeal. After comparing the responses of the Belgian children to films which had already been shown and liked in her own country she found that those most favoured were the adventure stories: 'Bush Christmas', the French 'Bim', the Swiss 'Heidi', the Russian 'Les Aventures de Tchouk et Guek', the Czech 'L'aventure dans la Baie d'Or', the American 'Gipsy Colt' and the Norwegian 'Toya'. It appeared to Mrs. Marcussen that the nationality of the films appeared to be of little consequence for the children she had observed.[44]

Alice Paton went on to Canada and the United States and in her search for films and television programs in those countries she was disappointed. In Canada she found that Dr. Rainsberry shared her feelings, and she reported that in America they:

> *... consider it unnecessary to provide special entertainment for children over 7 years of age, as these children are considered ready for adult entertainment.*[45]

The reason, suggested by Dr. Rainsberry,

> *... is that children of this age group (7-13 years) tend already to watch adult programs like 'Life with Father', the 'Perry Como Show' and even Jack Benny. This may have something to do with our social structure which seems to urge adulthood upon young children at the social level somewhat earlier than is the case with the British or European traditions.*[46]

In 1959 Senator Buttfield was invited to represent the ACCFT at a conference of the ICFC in Brussels. Her report described some harsh realities. The international organisation was struggling financially, and its objective to co-ordinate and rationalise activities in children's films with the co-operation of film producers, distributors and exhibitors was far from being realised.

Fourteen countries were represented at the conference but,

> *Even amongst these representatives there were some who came with the idea that someone would wave a big wand and say to all concerned - just let us know what is available in the way of films and we will have on hand an endless supply of films for*

> *children, no matter where. Ideas to begin with on how, when, where or why films appear from time to time were vague and often idealistic and unpractical - but the extremely difficult situation was eventually made clear and more reasoned discussion eventuated.*
>
> *Undoubtedly few films have been or are being produced for children in any country, though the Communist countries appear to be way ahead of the Western world in this field. They treat education, especially of the youth of the country, as a No. 1 priority and with the methods available to them for obtaining finance they can afford to spend lavishly on the production of educational, perhaps even propaganda, films for children, and they do. But production of films is not the main problem. Production, Distribution and Exhibition are indivisible units of the whole and essential to all is money - an almost unlimited supply, which Democratic countries do not have.*[47]

Senator Buttfield reported that there was general agreement with the proposition that production was likely to be easier in the future as, with the advent of television, children were finding a preference for 'family programmes', which were acceptable to adults as well as being suitable for children.[48]

But this was not a proposition guaranteed to find favour with the supporters of children's films in Australia where 'family programmes' had become synonymous with imported and censored adult films, and with the situation comedies and westerns shown on television.

The delegates at the international conference agreed that the production and distribution of children's films across countries would remain problematic because of language and cultural differences, and because cinema exhibition for children, which might entail only one show a week, or even a month, was not as profitable as more frequent exhibition for mass audiences.

The idea was proposed that individual National Centres should encourage educational and parents' organisations to become involved in guiding children's film choices.[49] But, ironically, that was where Australia had started - with parents and parents' organisations and with educationalists. As yet there was no sign that interest from those groups was going to help generate sufficient material from which to choose.

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[1] ACCFT Minutes, 30/3/57

[2] ibid

[3] ibid

4 ibid

5 'Age', 13/4/57

6 Letter, Mary Field to Alice Paton, 30/5/57

7 Letter, Mary Field to Bill Perkins, 11/12/57

8 Letter, Mary Field to Alice Paton, 30/5/57

9 Letter, Stanley Hawes to Bill Perkins, 18/6/57

10 Letter, Alice Paton to Bill Perkins, 15/8/57

11 Letter, Allen Fairhall to Alice Paton, 5/2/58

12 Letter, Mary Field to Bill Perkins, 27/3/58

13 Senate Question No. 7, 8/4/59

14 Letter, Luxton to Alice Paton, 6/4/59

15 Letter, R. Lord to Alice Paton, 9/4/59

16 Letter, Frank Wells to Alice Paton, 7/8/59

17 Letter, Alice Paton to R. Lord, 1/7/59

18 Hector Crawford, 'Commercial Television Programmes in Australia', 14/9/59, pp. 7 & 9

19 ibid, pp. 15-17

20 ibid, pp. 20-21

21 ibid, p. 14

22 'Daily Express' and 'New York Times', 26/5/59

23 'Herald', 7/3/59

24 TCCFT Report to ACCFT, 1961, and TCCFT Annual Report, 1975

25 ABT Research Report, 'Television in Australia, Its History Through the Ratings', 1980, p. 53

26 'Age', 12/1/60

27 ABT Research Report, 'Television in Australia, Its History Through the Ratings', 1980, p. 53

28 Mary Field, Chairman of the ICFC, in 'News', ICFC, June, 1957

29 J. Verniers, Vice-President, ICFC, 'News', ICFC, June, 1957

30 ACCFT Constitution adopted 28/3/58

[31] Letter, Jack Graham to Alice Paton, 21/2/58 and ACCFT Minutes of Meeting, 28/3/58

[32] ACCFT Minutes of Meeting, 28/3/58

[33] Letter, C. Campbell to Barbara Vaughan, 11/2/59

[34] Commonwealth Film Censorship Board, Report for 1958

[35] ibid, p. 2

[36] ACCFT 1st Biennial Meeting, 22-23/5/59 and 2nd Biennial Report, May, 1961

[37] Letters to Alice Paton, 1958 and 1959

[38] Letter, Dr. F. Rainsberry to Alice Paton, 4/2/58

[39] Mary Field in 'Film Programmes for the Young', Reports and Papers on Mass Communication, No. 28, UNESCO publication

[40] Letters between Barbara Vaughan and Alice Paton, 27/6/58 - 30/7/58

[41] ICFC 'News', October, 1958

[42] ICFC 'News' July, 1959

[43] Letter, Mary Field to Alice Paton, 12/1/59

[44] Elsa Marcussen, 'Film Programmes for the Young', ICFC 'News', July, 1959

[45] Report from Alice Paton, ACCFT Minutes, 22-23/5/59

[46] Letter, Dr. F. Rainsberry to Alice Paton, 5/12/58

[47] Nancy Buttfield, 'Report on Conference of the Leaders of the National Centres of Films for Children', Brussels, 26/11/59

[48] ibid

[49] ibid

Chapter 7

Films and Film Censorship in the Sixties

In the 1960s the membership of the ACCFT expanded. The re-constituted QCCFT joined the national body in 1963 and later regional councils were established in Newcastle, Wagga, Bathurst and Canberra.

Alice Paton retired as President in November 1963, and was succeeded by Bill Perkins. His wide film interests and ambitions gave emphasis to several different activities which included the production of films for children in Australia, screen education in schools, and improved censorship legislation.

The distances between the states continued to present a communication problem as subscriptions from affiliated organisations barely covered ACCFT administrative expenses, let alone providing funds for regular travel. To help overcome this, during the 1960s the Council's biennial meetings were held in Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne (twice) and Hobart. Travel to Perth and Brisbane was impossible. For practical purposes members of the Executive Committee were chosen from the south-eastern State Councils, but even their infrequent meetings tended to be influenced by travel opportunities arising from other work requirements, rather than by ACCFT priorities.

The restrictions on the exchange of information continued to hinder the development of a single-minded and cohesive national body although Alice Paton, for whom Bill Perkins had a high regard, was a moderating influence at some of the more controversial ACCFT meetings.[1] But during the years of Bill Perkins's presidency differences were exacerbated by his strong desire to achieve, his frustration with less ambitious State Council members, and his well-meaning, but independent actions, sometimes taken with little regard for ACCFT constitutional requirements.[2]

Communication with international organisations was maintained by letter and, whenever possible, by appointing conveniently located representatives to attend international meetings.

In 1961 the second long-awaited Australian-CFF children's feature was made, not in collaboration with the Australian National Film Board as the ACCFT had anticipated, but with the production company, Jimar Productions. This colour film 'Bungala Boys' was shot on beaches near Sydney and was typical of earlier CFF productions. Children played major roles, and emphasis was placed on locations which provided a colourful background to the simple story of 'good' versus 'bad' youths. In the film the activities of an Australian surf life-saving club were demonstrated, with the inclusion in the story of a dramatic shark rescue and an exciting surf-boat race.

'Bungala Boys' is marred by a dubbed sound track which contains a very curious and confusing mix of Cockney and broad Australian accents but in 1961, according to the 'Australian Women's Weekly', it was acclaimed by children in England.

> *Despite their unfamiliarity with sharks, the life-saving code or surf-boat racing, they followed episodes as keenly as if they had spent their lives at Manly - perhaps more so, as the very unfamiliarity of the settings and the events gave 'Bungala Boys' an original adventure line.*[3]

And 'Film Weekly' proudly described the successful London premiere of the film too, under the headline 'UK Lauds Local Film'.[4]

Another children's feature was made in Tasmania. Charles Wolnizer embarked on the production of a 35mm. colour adaptation of 'They Found a Cave', a children's book by Tasmanian author, Nan Chauncy. Five Hobart children played leading roles and adults were played by Tasmanian amateur actors with one professional, Beryl Meakin from Sydney. A Tasmanian, Peter Sculthorpe, composed the music which featured harmonica playing by Larry Adler.

Bill Perkins was inordinately proud of this effort by his fellow Tasmanians:

> *Our Council considers that this film is the first important result of our five year campaign for the production of a children's feature film in Australia. Without any help from the British Children's Film Foundation or the National Film Board, on which the Australian Council pinned its vain hopes for so many years, a Tasmanian company is 'going it alone' and, in spite of financial difficulties, is determined to complete the production of this excellent film.*[5]

But difficulties, mainly financial, abounded, and when the film was actually finished in 1962 by Visatone of Sydney the Tasmanians regarded it as little short of a miracle.[6]

'They Found a Cave' was shown at a world premiere in Hobart and was sold to Columbia for distribution in Australia, New Zealand and the USA. The CFF took up distribution rights for the UK, '... thus ensuring excellent publicity for Tasmania overseas.'[7]

Henry Geddes, Frank Wells's successor at the CFF, was very satisfied with the response of English audiences when the film was shown in several provincial centres. He attended two where, on each occasion, it 'went down well' with over 1,000 children.[8]

In 1965 a children's feature was made for the ACCFT by the Australian National Film Board. Tim Burstall was the director.

The idea for this film came from the prize winning entry to a story competition initiated by the Council. The VCCFT decided to use the opportunity to find out from children what they would like to see in their films, and publicised the competition through schools, newspapers, radio, and television. Eight hundred Victorian children responded and their stories were analysed by a VCCFT member, Margaret Standish. She found that the children had

> *... entered into the spirit of the idea with openly expressed enjoyment, describing with lively interest the things they understand. And with these stories of horses, dogs, kangaroos, farms, beaches, old mines, deserts and hidden valleys they have combined their favourite ingredients of fantasy.*
>
> *... The composite picture is alive, refreshing and Australian.*
>
> *... there is a feeling of pride in belonging to Australia and showing us what it can do.*
>
> *... We are left with an interesting set of figures, a predominantly female opinion, and a strong impression that young Australians want their own films.*[9]

A 13-year-old Victorian school girl, Rosalind Wright, was chosen the national winner of the competition by film producers Stanley Hawes, Roger Mirams and Hector Crawford, and the black and white film 'Nullabor Hideout' was eventually made from her story. The script, written by Tim Burstall, bears little resemblance to the original story, but Rosalind's ideas of the vast Nullabor, the importance of the 'tea and sugar' train, and the discovery of an exciting subterranean lake are all included, with music composed by George Dreyfus.

Henry Geddes was not impressed with 'Nullabor Hideout'. It was too short for a feature and too long for a support. He wrote that he found it very slow and 'although technically well made, not nearly as imaginatively directed as we would expect one of our own films to be.'[10]

Mr. Geddes then continued:

> *During the coming year we will be stepping up production very considerably, and in fact hope to make not less than 13 films (5 serials, 6 features and 2 English versions of Continental children's features). We hope also to obtain a 40 per cent increase in*

> *grant, which together with our revenue from various sources should ensure that our future production will not be less than 7 films per year.*[11]

Roger Mirams made a feature in 1965. This film, 'Funny Things Happen Down Under', described as a sequel to the Terrible Ten television series, starred the Joe Latona Dancers, the Horrie Dargie Quintet and a young Olivia Newton John in a mix of comedy, singing, dancing and strong images of the Australian bush. But Roger Mirams's company, Pacific Films, suffered a financial loss after hiring Melbourne's Princess Theatre to show the film during the summer of 1966-67.[12] Overall, the results of these isolated attempts to cater for children in Australia in the 1960s were not encouraging, particularly as the Australian film industry had become 'more moribund than ever' with many aspiring film-makers finding work making commercials for television.[13]

Producers Charles Wolnizer, Roger Mirams, Geoffrey Thompson, John Kingsford Smith, Tim Burstall and Stanley Hawes all attended ACCFT meetings in the early sixties, and some of them addressed public forums organised by the ACCFT in an effort to resolve the overwhelming problem of finance, but without success.

However, the lobbying by individuals and organisations for government assistance to re-establish an indigenous film and television industry was gaining momentum. The ACCFT elicited sympathetic responses from politicians to its pleas for Australian films for children.[14]

Opportunities for co-production with the CFF appeared to be diminishing as, in the mid-sixties, the British organisation was using only UK companies to make its films in other countries. The expense of sending technicians on location was met with financial grants from government departments or tourist organisations in the countries featured. Egypt, Malta, Libya and East Africa were all used in this way.[15]

This was not exactly the sort of joint venture Bill Perkins had in mind when he talked of co-production in Australia, possibly with the Commonwealth Film Unit,[16] and he expressed a desire for independence:

> *As in most other fields today, we can no longer look to Britain to help us with what is entirely our own responsibility.*[17]

Bill Perkins's ideas for a children's film foundation in Australia captured the interest of Godfrey Philipp, the producer of two children's television series, 'The Magic Circle Club' and 'Adventure Island', and John McCallum, the executive producer of 'Skippy'.[18] Amendments were made to the ACCFT constitution which enabled individuals such as these to join the Council in their own right, and for a time the membership and direction of the Council changed.

The VCCFT remained important to the national body but other less active State Councils were rejected by Bill Perkins as 'a complete dead loss, both financially and in any other way.'[19] He desired

> *to make the council more professional, positive and efficient and chiefly concerned with the provision of better screen entertainment for children on both aesthetic and moral grounds; and*
>
> *to correct the impression (not entirely unjustifiable) among a minority of the public which is aware of our Council's existence that we are a small group of vague do-gooders obsessed with censorship and trying to impose our middle-aged, middle-brow standards on today's children and teenagers.*[20]

In August 1969 the Australian Council for the Arts responded to an ACCFT application for financial assistance by granting it $10,000 for a number of specified projects. $1,000 was allocated to investigating the formation of an Australian Children's Film and Television Foundation.

The first meeting of the Foundation sub-committee, convened by Bill Perkins, was chaired by John McCallum and attended by Denys Brown of the Commonwealth Film Unit, Adrian Jose and Jack Quaine of the ABCB, A. Kendall of the ABC, and Godfrey Philipp. Frank Meaney, President of the Newcastle Children's Film and Television Council in NSW, attended as an ACCFT representative.[21]

The mood of that meeting, held at the end of 1969, was optimistic, although it was agreed that two major obstacles, finance and distribution, would have to be resolved before there could be any hope of achieving long-term success.[22]

Meanwhile, the more pragmatically-minded members of the State Councils were preoccupied with their efforts to sustain the regular exhibition of children's films. They moved from one crisis to another in their efforts to obtain an adequate supply, and in 1960 the WAACFT had reported:

> *This state still feels the absence elsewhere of copies of the CFF children's films, without which as a norm of the right sort of film, a good deal of the propaganda value of the Association is lost. Our Association felt that perhaps more than anywhere else in Australia, we created a widespread demand in the Commercial Cinema for such films, and the loss of copies of these films meant that we had a demand without a supply.*[23]

The following year the WAACFT had no money to send a delegate to the ACCFT Biennial Meeting in Adelaide, and in its report claimed that there were no children's films available for any screenings in its state.[24]

Things looked better in 1962 when CFF films were shown at children's film 'festivals' organised by State Councils in school holidays. In Brisbane the antagonism which had existed between some of the local film exhibitors and the supporters of children's films was still in evidence and, according to the QCCFT report, their festival was organised after 'absolute opposition' from the film industry. However, 3,250 children attended and gave a 'splendid reception' to the films.[25]

Screenings in Perth were held under very different circumstances as they were organised by the Festival of Perth Committee with the complete co-operation of the management of the Grand Theatre.[26]

In Melbourne in 1962 the VCCFT participated in a five-day festival, held in association with the ACCFT and the Melbourne Film Festival at the Palais Theatre. Five CFF features were shown with shorts from Columbia Pictures, the Commonwealth Film Unit and MGM. VCCFT members were rostered as ushers for audiences which ranged in size from 500 to 1,500 each day. This event marked the beginning of several years of holiday screenings in Victoria, when the number of locations expanded from one to three or four.[27]

But the BEF distribution of CFF films in Australia remained limited and, according to Bill Perkins, its policy in importing the films seemed to be 'obscure and largely a matter of stop-and-go'.[28] The regular commercial use of CFF films had declined and BEF interest, which had never been high, was falling. From a business point of view it made no sense for the company to continue buying the rights to films which it did not promote, and in which there was only spasmodic interest from commercial exhibitors. However, early responses to the holiday festivals which had been organised by the Children's Film and Television Councils looked promising, so while the ACCFT continued to encourage the use of its films, BEF agreed to continue importing them.[29]

The VCCFT found that with a holiday festival each year it could profitably make maximum use of three new features over one or two weeks, although changing financial arrangements and different locations meant that every year was a new experience for the VCCFT volunteers and the cinema managers with whom they worked. It was a particularly difficult year in 1967 as the introduction of 70 mm film meant the unexpected loss of hundreds of seats at the large and very popular Rivoli and Dendy cinemas when the seating configuration was changed.[30]

The proceeds of the early festivals in Victoria were divided amongst the cinemas, BEF, and the VCCFT, with the cinemas receiving a third of the gross takings, or their operational costs, whichever was higher.[31] The managers were responsible for the operation of their theatres; providing and supervising projectionists, box office staff and cleaners, and arranging for film handling and ticket sales. The VCCFT selected the films, designed and provided all the publicity, which included the distribution of printed pamphlets to children through their schools. The Council also provided supervisors and ushers to seat and look after the children at all festival venues.[32] The combination of Scheff's film expertise and Alice Paton's skill in attracting capable and committed voluntary workers was invaluable for the success of these events which attracted thousands of children annually.

Not all festival locations in Victoria were profitable but Council members persevered, believing it was worth the effort to reach a wide range of children and to ensure that three new CFF titles would be imported each year.[33]

In 1966 BEF announced that it could no longer afford to import the films because the returns were too small.[34]

Melbourne's festival was not held in 1966, but was resurrected the following year after the ACCFT agreed to BEF's request for a $1,500 guarantee for three new titles. All State Councils were asked to contribute with funds raised from their screenings, and the amount was finally made up with $800 from Victoria, and $200 each from the TCCFT and the SACFT. The WACCFT, which lost heavily on its festival in 1967, was able to pay only $20. The NSWCCFT did not contribute but $240 was added by the Australian National Television Council (ANTC) after it staged a festival in Sydney. The ACCFT made up the balance with $40.[35]

Another ACCFT affiliate, the Newcastle CCFT, which held financially successful screenings, had to pay BEF directly as the agreement covered Council screenings in capital cities only.[36]

It was a most unsatisfactory financial arrangement for the ACCFT,[37] particularly when in 1968 the same guarantee of $1,500 was sought for three more films, and only Victoria and Tasmania were able to promise significant contributions towards this amount. The SACFT offered $50.[38]

The entire operation, which required close co-operation between the voluntary and often inexperienced members of the State Councils, the ANTC (which continued to organise the Sydney festivals), BEF offices, (particularly in Melbourne and Sydney) and Bill Perkins in Tasmania, was becoming an administrative nightmare.

Their troubles increased when the ABC and ATN showed interest in buying the television rights to CFF films. It was a development that initially pleased Bill Perkins as it meant more children would see them, but his feelings changed when he realised that some of the newer titles, still being used by the Councils, might be included.[39]

And in an another incident which typified the many problems experienced by the part-time amateur exhibitors, the ACCFT, desperately anxious to increase the use of CFF films throughout Australia, and its South Australian affiliate began to head in different directions.

The SAFCT had organised several screenings for children, either independently or in association with the Adelaide Film Festival, with whom they shared the profits. Their features were chosen from a variety of sources and after very successful programs in 1965, with 'The Red Balloon' attracting full houses every time it was shown, the SACFT Secretary, Pat Tedmanson wrote to Bill Perkins:

> *The audience is available, but the trouble seems to be getting the films to show them. Could you help us with a list of distributors that we might write to them for details of what is in the country? There is a limit to the Children's Film Foundation films and we do not know where to look beyond them.*[40]

The relationship between the SACFT and the Adelaide Film Festival also deteriorated, with Bill Perkins supporting the latter, and its 'younger professional men', Eric Williams of the Workers' Educational Association and George Klein of the Audio Visual Education Centre.[41] But with their knowledge of films and film supply they were not prepared to play a secondary role to other states, and in May 1968 the Adelaide Film Festival showed feature films chosen from a variety of sources, rather than those from the CFF.

> *We realised that we could not have the new films that were going to Victoria and as we have had most of the other films we are not using CFF this year, and will commence to use them again next year going back to the earliest ones.*[42]

At the ACCFT Biennial Meeting in 1969 the possibility of the Council importing CFF films directly was explored for a second time. It was too late to do anything before the 1969 festivals and, although the guarantee for three new films in colour had been increased to $2,100, they agreed to pay this.[43]

SAFCT members were unhappy as they perceived BEF to be the only one to benefit from this arrangement[44] and so Victoria contributed $840, Tasmania $420, the NSWCCFT, with a new President, Joan Brennan, offered $300, the Adelaide Film Festival $350, and the WAACFT and

QCCFT gave assurances that they would try to make up the balance. SACFT members declared they were undecided about screening any CFF films in the future.[45]

BEF finally decided to withdraw and in December 1969 Bill Perkins announced that the ACCFT would be able to purchase the rights for 35 mm prints of all new titles.[46] It is unlikely that BEF's General Manager, Fred Crouch, had any regrets over the new arrangement.

On the international scene, despite disillusionment with the ICFC, the ACCFT continued to participate in some of its activities. An Australian program featuring 'The Prize' was sent to an ICFC sponsored meeting in India in 1960 and, over five years, Australian school children won prizes for their film-making in an annual competition in Milan run by the ICFC and Italian cultural organisations. The first of these 'Tenth Muse' contests was held in 1963 when Lynne Fowler of South Australia received a first prize for an 8mm. silent film and Peter Drummond's students at Brighton Grammar School in Victoria won a first in the 16mm. section, as well as the Gran Premio for the outstanding film of the competition.

The following year, with 15 European countries participating, the Brighton Grammar boys were again successful, and a 15-year-old Victorian boy, Chris Lofven of 'Kangaroo Films', was awarded a first for his 16 mm sound film 'House With a Secret'.[47] Similar successes were achieved over the next few years with Brighton Grammar winning its fourth prize in 1967.[48]

Beyond this, the benefits of ICFC membership for antipodean Australia were not always clear. A trend towards emphasising screen education appealed to Bill Perkins but, although she was a strong advocate of this need, Alice Paton was more concerned to see positive action from the organisation in facilitating the circulation of children's films around the world. After some debate Australian membership continued with the ACCFT offering to pay, from its meagre finances, only a third of the requested subscription of $200.[49]

As far as screen education in schools was concerned, Australia was moving slowly. Tasmania had introduced film appreciation as part of the English Literature course in some secondary schools in 1956, and in 1960 the subject became an examinable section of the four-year-English course in Tasmanian state and independent schools. In other states interested teachers ran occasional classes, and some film-making was attempted, but there was no co-ordinated effort.[50]

Wider interest in the subject was generated when John Huntley, of the British Film Institute, visited Australia in 1965. After participating in a UNESCO seminar 'Music for Film' in Adelaide, he toured all states delivering lectures on the benefits of film education for adults and children. In his report to the ACCFT Bill Perkins described Mr. Huntley's visit as

> *One of the highlights of the past two years ... his whole visit was a most valuable stimulus for all people engaged in the teaching of film appreciation and to many in film and television production.*[51]

There were other members of the Children's Film and Television Councils who tried. Dr. Rupert Goodman, Reader in Education in the Department of External Studies at the University of Queensland, and President of the QCCFT, devised a curriculum based on some of Bill Perkins's ideas. The Queensland Education Department took no action but, as in other states, individual schools gradually developed an interest in the subject.[52]

In South Australia Eileen Sharman, a teacher and member of the SACFT, introduced a film study course to 21 Technical High Schools as part of their English syllabus.[53] Before coming to Australia in 1958 Eileen Sharman had been a member of the British Film Institute and she was delighted to find Australians like Bill Perkins and May Mills, who shared her enthusiasm for films, as she was keen to encourage the development of film discrimination in adults and children in her new country.[54]

In the 1960s there was also the on-going and vexed question of film censorship legislation.

Bill Perkins side-stepped the predominantly protective arguments of the past and introduced a new argument to the Children's Film and Television Councils by promoting the view that with legally enforceable regulations preventing children from seeing certain films, the excessive mutilation of films for adult audiences would no longer be necessary. This was an argument supported by the wider community of film enthusiasts in Australia, and it was accepted by a majority of the Councils but not by Queensland or Victoria.[55]

The VCCFT was still dealing with a State Government that had declared its support for the theatre managers, and it refused to respond to any argument for legislation on behalf of adults, proposed by a children's film and television council.[56] It still insisted that experience with the 'six to sixteen' law prior to 1932 was sufficient to expect that all responsibility for children's film-going should lie with parents. After repeal of the early legislation the exhibitors had given an undertaking that at matinees on Saturdays and public holidays, when children were likely to attend the cinema in large numbers 'only films approved unconditionally' would be exhibited. Thirty years later the Victorian Government was confident that the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association would continue to observe this undertaking.[57]

But there were still anomalies which concerned the Councils and there was confusion over classification symbols, particularly in cinema advertising.[58]

In 1963 the Chief Censor reported:

> *Many films are unsuitable for children and there has been some reluctance on the part of exhibitors to include censor classifications in their advertising ... We consider it is quite improper for exhibitors to advertise a film as unsuitable for children and in the same advertisement announce that children will be admitted at half price.*[59]

But in the 1960s, with the fear of competition from television hanging over their heads, any suggestion of legislation which might have an impact on the box office was alarming to film exhibitors. The VCCFT reported that some exhibitors responded to complaints by showing 'G' films at Saturday matinees, but this was by no means universal.[60]

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[1] Betty Rankin, Interview with Adrian Jose, 30/4/84

[2] Betty Rankin, Interview with Frank Meaney, May, 1985

[3] 'Australian Women's Weekly', 31/1/62

[4] 'Film Weekly', 21/12/61

[5] TCCFT Report for ACCFT Biennial Meeting, May, 1961

[6] TCCFT Report to ACCFT, May 1963

[7] Bill Perkins, 'A Brief History of the First Ten Years of the TCCFT', 1965

[8] Letter, Henry Geddes to Bill Perkins, 26/11/64

[9] M.E. Standish, MA, 'The Australian Picture', Issued by the VCCFT, c. 1962

[10] Letter, Henry Geddes to Bill Perkins, 21/12/65

[11] ibid

[12] ACCFT Fifth Biennial Report, 1965-67

[13] Geoffrey Thompson, ACCFT Minutes of Executive Meeting, 13-14/4/62

[14] Senate question No. 15 from Senator Buttfield, 5/10/60 and correspondence with Senators Hannan and Spooner, 10/10/60 - 18/1/61

[15] Letter, Henry Geddes to Bill Perkins, 19/3/65

[16] ACCFT Executive Meeting Minutes , 17/8/68

[17] W.H. Perkins, ACCFT Paper, 'Explanatory Statement on Agenda Items', 22/3/69, p. 4

[18] W.H. Perkins, ACCFT President's Annual Newsletter, December, 1968 and correspondence, 1968

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20 ACCFT Sixth Biennial Report, 1967-69

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29 Letter, Bill Perkins to G.W.R. Thom, 24/9/64

30 Junior Holiday Film Festival, Minutes of meeting, 7/3/67

31 Junior Holiday Film Festival, Minutes of meeting, 7/3/67 and Interview with Edwin Schefferle, 5/4/84

32 Junior Holiday Film Festival, 'Instruction Sheet for Voluntary Staff', September, 1964

33 Junior Film Festival Committee, Minutes of meeting, 13/10/64

34 VCCFT Minutes, 28/2/66 and ACCFT Minutes of Executive Meeting, 4/6/66

35 ACCFT Minutes of Executive Meeting, 17/8/68

36 ACCFT Minutes of Executive Meeting, 17/8/68

37 Letter, Bill Perkins to Fred Crouch, BEF, 24/6/69

38 Letter, Pat Tedmanson to Bill Perkins, 12/8/68

39 Letters between Bill Perkins and BEF, 1967-1969

40 Letter, Pat Tedmanson to Bill Perkins, 6/12/65

41 Letter, Bill Perkins to Eric Williams, 3/4/67

42 Letter, George Klein to ACCFT Secretary, Patricia Braithwaite, 16/4/68

43 ACCFT Minutes of Sixth Biennial Meeting, 19-20/4/69

44 Letter, May Mills and Pat Tedmanson to Bill Perkins, 12/7/69

45 ACCFT Executive Meeting Minutes , 20-21/9/69

[46] President's Newsletter, December, 1969

[47] ACCFT Fourth Biennial Report, 1963-65

[48] ACCFT Fifth Biennial Report, 1967-69

[49] ACCFT Minutes of Executive Meeting, 8/4/64

[50] 'Teaching the Teachers of Screen Education in Australia', ACCFT Report to an ICFC Meeting in Oslo, October, 1962

[51] ACCFT Fourth Biennial Report, 1963-65

[52] Betty Rankin, Interview with Rupert Goodman, 5/10/83

[53] Newsletter of the Film and Television Council of South Australia (SACFT), March, 1966 and Betty Rankin, Interview with Eileen Sharman, 9/3/84

[54] Betty Rankin, Interviews with Eileen Sharman, 9 & 13/3/84

[55] Letter, Bill Perkins to Alice Paton, 19/12/66 and Betty Rankin, Interview with Rupert Goodman,5/10/83

[56] Letters, J. Dillon, Under Secretary, Government of Victoria, 23/12/66, and Elaine Doyle, President, VCCFT 3/7/67, 7/3/68 & 26/3/68, to Bill Perkins.

[57] Letter, J.C. Macgibbon, Acting Secretary, Premier's Dept. to Virginia Gibbs, President VCCFT, 6/6/62

[58] F.M. Chamberlin, 'Children and Adult Films', Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1964, pp. 35-55, and Newspaper clippings collected by TCCFT and VCCFT

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Chapter 8

Children's Television in the Sixties

Although films dominated the activities of the children's film and television councils in the 1960s, television continued to attract large audiences, and as transmission hours and the hours of viewing increased, criticism over the dearth of suitable material for young audiences mounted.

Children who had previously attended the cinema weekly now had the opportunity to view television daily, and much of the material screened was considered to be of little value for them. There was also concern over the predominance of programs which had crime and violence as their major themes.

The first phase of a series of studies with Victorian children was published in 1957 but, like the research from overseas, it was inconclusive and it offered no help to anyone hoping to influence television programmers.

This research, sponsored by the ABCB, was carried out at the Department of Audio-Visual Aids at the University of Melbourne by a psychologist, R.J. Thomson, formerly Senior Research Officer with the Board. The purpose of the study was to find the effects of crime-drama programs on young audiences. Reports were released in three stages over four years and these were reported by the press in simplistic, and sometimes misleading, terms.

Newman Rosenthal was quoted in a Melbourne 'Herald' editorial as saying that the early experiments with Westerns suggested they were 'wholesome and stimulating'. And that, said the article, was well known to the 'ordinary mind' before being scientifically demonstrated. The writer continued:

> *... if the more anxious parent has now been given the comfort of psychological approval of Westerns, the University may permit itself to notch up another item of public service rendered.*[1]

But some parents were far from convinced, and two years later, when further findings were reported under headlines 'Children Unhurt by TV Crime Films'[2] and 'Children Can Take It'[3] the VCCFT acted. A letter was sent to the ABCB's Chairman, Mr. Osborne, requesting that he make a public statement clarifying the position. The press statements, declared the VCCFT, appeared to be in conflict with suggestions, both from local reports and those of the British Nuffield Report, that the values and emotions of young children could be influenced by some programs and:

> *There is now considerable confusion in the minds of parents and many working for the welfare of children, who feel that doubt has been cast on what seemed to be the dictates of common sense and good taste in controlling children's viewing.*[4]

Mr. Osborne agreed that the press statements were misleading but he refused the request to make a statement, pointing out the difficulty of communicating adequately with the public on the findings of complex psychological studies.[5]

This was not a difficulty that restrained the newspaper journalists, who responded in the same sensational terms to the controversy on television violence as they had to violence in the cinema, omitting to make any distinction between the reactions of different age groups of 'children'.[6]

There were many factors that contributed to violence in the community and it was impossible to prove conclusively, one way or the other, that a causal relationship existed between film and television viewing, and violent behaviour. But that did not mean there was no effect, and ultimately it was not 'scientific' proof that kept people involved in the children's television debate, it was their 'common sense', their personal values and standards, and their knowledge of children. They had expected more from television than a plethora of mass audience programs of the 'shoot-em-up' kind, particularly when they were shown at times when children were known to be viewing.

They believed that children were being influenced, and Alice Paton still enjoys telling a story she was told in the early days of television: A woman was asked by her grandson: 'Have you got a mother?' 'Yes, but she is dead now,' was the reply, 'Who shot her?' the young boy asked.[7]

In his report Mr. Thomson referred to the possibility of children acquiring stereotyped and insensitive reactions to violence although this, he pointed out, could be perceived as 'callous indifference' by some, or 'hard-headed realism' by others.[8] In 'Visual Aids Review' Newman Rosenthal reported that a good quality family film was enjoyed more by the young adolescents in the study than most crime films. And there appeared to be significant differences between adult and child responses to film tension. Some scenes creating tension in adults had no effect on children but

> *... a child being tormented or neglected or unjustly treated, stimulated considerable anxiety and violent reaction in the child.*[9]

David Martin, who was responsible for the content analyses of films used in the research, speculated about the long-term effects of viewing certain types of material. In 1961 he found changes from previous analyses he had made, especially in Westerns, and in what appeared to be an increasingly ambiguous role for women:

> *The position is very bad ... we are confronted already with a more or less total devaluation of women across the entire group of tension programmes, with the situation least serious in the older institutional crime films.*[10]

He also found surprising program classifications. A 'G' classified Western, 'Outlaw of the Trail' featured a boy hero aged 11-12 years and was shown at 6 p.m. The film was:

> *... highly traumatic, very 'dark' with night settings, and extremely, almost purposelessly, violent. The boy is pursued while he is a helpless passenger in a wagon laden with explosives. Anxiety is aroused in the traditional way, but the denouement is feeble compared with the tension build-up; hardly any time to relieve or release anxiety or to explain plausibly the positive solution.*[11]

David Martin commented on the amount of overt violence seen by children viewing television and he was critical of the solution for programmers, which was to have classifications altered with editing by the Film Censor. He suggested:

> *The breakthrough is to be looked for, I think, in positive measures to lift the quality and variety of films for younger children and in educating television producers and consumers in how the instrument works.*[12]

But as the hours of transmission increased, with some children watching television until quite late in the evening,[13] 'children's' programs, as a percentage of the total hours transmitted by the commercial channels in Melbourne, declined. Between 1956 and 1960 they fell from 14.9% of the total to 9.3%. In 1961 'children' became a sub-category of 'family' in the ABCB statistics and the decline continued: from 8.6% in 1961 to 7.63% in 1962. In Sydney 'children's' programs were a low 4.4% of the total in 1960 although they rose to 6.81% in 1962.[14]

This trend did not stop children viewing and it meant that, increasingly, they were watching unsuitable, or at best, 'G' classified programs, a classification which was expected to encompass all ages from two to 16 years.

This shortage of material for children was, for the members of the Children's Film and Television Councils, a repeat of their experience with the cinema. It also created an unwelcome problem for the ABCB, which in 1964 reported:

> *On several occasions when the question of programmes to which children may be exposed has been under discussion, the Board has been informed that the tastes of Australian television audiences are becoming increasingly sophisticated. There would be no hesitation in accepting such a statement if it applied to persons who are reasonably mature. Unfortunately, in some quarters the argument is also advanced in respect of children and adolescents, almost to the extent that no longer are children assumed to have any childhood. As a result of this line of thought, the types of programme which formerly were designed to provide for children of between 7 and 12 have almost disappeared and television today tends to concentrate on young children or the teenage group. It has been suggested that films of adventure or comedy and cartoons, will satisfactorily fill the gap and entertain children over a wide range of ages. There appears to be little doubt that such programmes are popular, though whether this form of entertainment contains anything that will benefit as well as entertain children is by no means certain.*[15]

Further criticism was made by the ABCB's Advisory Committee on Children's Programs which met in the presence of Adrian Jose, the Director of Program Services. In retrospect Mr. Jose believes there were times when the Committee probably expected too much, but he also recalls that some of the channel executives were quite unwilling to respond to any of their suggestions. A policy which had been adopted by the commercial channels, that each program segment should pay for itself with the advertising revenue it could attract, did not favour productions of quality for children.[16]

Enid Shann recalls some station managers as quite aggressive and interested only in their ratings. Even requests that program classifications be advertised, and that classifications be flashed on the screen, were initially rejected.[17] Some, like Channel 7 in Perth, did co-operate and it was noted by the WAACFT that parents were warned of the close of children's time by an announcement on air that the sessions following were for adults.[18]

In 1962 the ABCB Committee reported:

> *It is perhaps significant that some of the problems which now confront us are identical with those which concerned us in 1957 - the significance lying in the power which commercial interests appear to be able to bring to bear against the goodwill and basic common sense that various station managers have displayed in discussion with the Committee at different times.*[19]

The Committee had expected more from children's television than the American 'Mickey Mouse Club', and some of the shows being telecast live from the studios. Comperes had improved with experience; they were popular and they appeared to have some understanding of children,[20] but Professor Frederick always found it difficult to respond with enthusiasm to personalities such as Happy Hammond and Princess Panda![21]

The Committee also criticised the magnitude of prizes awarded on children's shows. Commercial television had brought with it, to an unprecedented extent, the commercial exploitation of children's interests and leisure time, and prizes such as an overseas trip for a child and parents, blocks of land, and large sums of money for little effort were considered to be quite unacceptable in teaching appropriate values. The Committee was also concerned:

> *... that substantial consolation or booby prizes were awarded, seemingly as encouragement to other children to enter competitions; and that many competitions were seriously over-commercialised both by the free and unsystematic distribution of a sponsor's products, and by the exploitation of parents through the interests and enthusiasms of the child.*[22]

There were positive aspects. The number of Pedal Clubs increased after demonstrations on the 'Happy Show' and, according to Enid Shann, there was a drop in the number of cycling accidents involving children.[23] For a time this show also had a well-run general knowledge quiz, a writing competition for children, and on the 'S.S. Bee Adventure Show' there were filmed 'documentary style' segments shown weekly.[24]

Two other live children's programs attracted interest and praise. One, in Perth, was compered by the talented Rolf Harris, and the other, 'Southern Stars', was written, produced and compered by Joanne Priest for Rupert Murdoch's channel NWS9 in Adelaide.[25]

This weekly one-hour program was developed from the children's theatre shows regularly produced by Joanne Priest prior to the introduction of television. The television program was directed by John Stapp and was telecast live every Sunday afternoon from Joanne Priest's Adelaide theatre.[26]

Music, art, craft, ballet, folk dancing, books and athletics were included, plus segments on subjects as diverse as jewellery and gardens. Aspects of Australian, European and Aboriginal culture were introduced, and a segment 'Boy's Talk' for boys only. Children took part in 'Making a Ballet', 'Making an Opera', and in short plays; adults from the local community, such as children's author Colin Thiele, shared their expertise on subjects related to their work and recreational interests. It was, Joanne Priest emphasises, entertainment for children and not 'grim education'.[27]

For this contribution to children's programming, Rupert Murdoch, a newcomer to the business of television in 1959, was regarded by the ABCB Advisory Committee as 'a knight in shining armour'.[28]

But after five and a half years the 49-year-old Joanne Priest was exhausted. Her 'best days of creation were over', and so was the show.[29] The ABC's John Appleton, for whom she had enormous regard, was interested in scripted segments, but so much of the show had been spontaneous:

> *... they are finding it difficult in knowing how to present the program to the public, added to this I am myself in the doldrums, knowing I have not mastered the change over from an informal program to a formal program, and one of 1/2 the time ... one so quickly loses confidence, not for the cause, but for one's ability to serve it. My trip abroad was disastrous - no one is trying to do the same sort of thing as I am. The BBC wondered if I could stay and establish a school such as mine in order to provide programs ... No one has any conception how long these things take.*[30]

Children's programs declined, and when channel personnel failed to respond to their suggestions, the members of the Advisory Committee turned their attention towards educating parents, in the hope that better informed parents would exercise more control, and limit the viewing of their children. A leaflet, 'Helping Children to Use Television Wisely' was distributed through schools in all states.[31]

Members of the NSW Association of University Women Graduates - parents, teachers, and community leaders - undertook to make a study of children's television, although before commencing they had decided that

> *... we were indeed studying a myth. However, the Sydney television channels are creating reality from this myth within the limits of the Australian Broadcasting Control Board standards and within the limits also of their own sense of responsibility, and the pressure exerted by commercial interests, profits and ratings.*[32]

They found an 'immense ignorance' of the existence of any program standards both within their own organisation and amongst the general public, and it appeared from their monitoring of programs shown in Sydney that no attempt was being made by the television channels to strike a balance between programs of sheer entertainment and those of 'enrichment' as specified by the ABCB.[33]

Questions about Australian television were raised in Parliament, and the effects on children were stressed by both major political parties during debates.

In a speech in the Senate in August 1959, Senator Nancy Buttfield referred to the second-rate programs, many of American origin, that were being watched by thousands of Australian children and which she believed posed a threat to national identity. She suggested a 10% charge on the revenue of the television channels to assist in the production of local material.[34]

The following year the Senate debated over two days on the subjects, introduced by Senator Hannan, of the dominance of foreign films and television programs in Australia, and the possibilities that existed for developing a local film industry. Children were regarded as particularly vulnerable because of their limited ability to assess information from programs which were predominantly American in origin.

Not all Senators agreed with these concerns. Senator Vincent, who had an extensive knowledge and love of the theatre, believed the whole affair had been exaggerated. After all parents controlled the television set and could turn it off, and rather than American, it was British 'stage and screen' that dominated Australian, and even American culture. Given time he believed an Australian 'cultural form' would emerge.[35]

Actors' Equity also entered the debate in protest over the lack of Australian programs being made for television.[36]

In November 1962, Senator Hannan successfully moved that a Senate Committee be set up to inquire into the Australian production of films and programs for television. Senators Hannan and Vincent were appointed with two other members from the Government, and three from the Opposition. Senator Vincent was elected Chairman.[37]

In view of his earlier comments it is reasonable to assume from the report of this inquiry that Senator Vincent must have been surprised by the extent of public opinion which was critical of the quality and content of television programs in Australia. Altogether 139 people appeared, either in their own right, or as the representatives of community groups. There were film producers, actors, writers, musicians, educationalists, academics, women's groups, religious groups, and groups with a specific interest in children. Members of the television and advertising industries also made submissions.[38]

It was an opportunity for Alice Paton to present a case for children's television to a major inquiry for the second time. On this occasion she represented the ACCFT and she spoke on behalf of a public with which the Councils had become closely associated through their film screenings, their regular public forums, and talks to parent and community groups. Representatives from most of the state children's film and television councils appeared also: Miss Mills for the SACFT, Judge Andrews and Mrs. Curnow for the QCCFT, Mrs. George and Mr. Moore for the TCCFT, and Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Uren for the WAACFT. The VCCFT submitted a written report.

In its written submission the ACCFT appealed to the patriotic sentiments of the Senators:

> *We should develop in our young people a great pride in their own country and television is a very powerful medium which should be put to this use. It is better to show them the best of our Australian way of life rather than the undesirable facets of other countries, and a more responsible selection of overseas films coupled with a more extensive and authentic representation of Australia would give a more honest impression of life elsewhere, a better perspective of Australia's place in the world and more balanced programs.*
>
> *It is inconceivable to think, for instance, that the American public would countenance television programs consisting entirely of material produced outside America. Why then should the films presented to our children be mainly American? This is not in the national interest.*[39]

The QCCFT referred to the success of the Australian-made children's cinema film 'They Found a Cave', and suggested that, with government assistance, it should be possible to adapt other Australian books such as 'We of the Never Never' and 'The Man from Snowy River' for children.[40]

The Vincent Report was published in October 1963. It was critical of the performance and the attitudes of some of the commercial channels[41] and it was critical of the ABCB's performance which had allowed them to fail to cater adequately for minority and special interest audiences.[42] It also criticised the use of the 'ratings' as the sole indicator of audience response,[43] and it criticised the total lack of any long-term co-ordinated research on the impact of the medium.[44]

With reference to the Broadcasting and Television Act, 1942-62, it argued against the belief that the ABCB had no power to enforce its own program standards, and it condemned the Board for its failure to act under the power which it believed had been invested in it by the Parliament.[45]

The Committee stated that children were:

> *... the most important section of the viewing public in that they are most likely to be affected by the impact of television.*[46]

It recommended that fewer repeats of imported programs be used for children's entertainment, that family time be extended by half an hour in order to reduce the number of violent programs viewed by children, and that the ABC and commercial licensees provide programs specifically for the age groups five and under, six to 11, and 12 to 16 years.[47]

Drama had become the most popular form of television entertainment in Australia and it was regarded by the Committee as having ...

> *... the greatest psychological and emotional impact upon the audience of all types of television programmes. A programme in 'dramatic' form is therefore the most powerful weapon of all in its effect upon the moral standards of the community and in influencing its values.*[48]

and

> *...Perhaps the greatest danger lies in its (television's) effect on the rising generation ... who, day after day, are not only receiving anything but the most inadequate picture of Australia, her national traditions, culture and way of life, but in its place are recipients of a highly coloured and exaggerated picture of the way of life and morals of other countries (mainly the United States of America).*[49]

The Vincent Committee recommended economic assistance to encourage the development of expertise in indigenous theatrical drama and films, together with a gradually increasing and enforceable quota for local content in television programming.[50]

It was a remarkably different point of view from that expressed by Sydney's 'Daily Telegraph'[51] and the 'Sunday Telegraph'.[52]

After implying a link between critics of Australian television and supporters of Communism, the latter declared:

> *The TV pressure groups ignore the warnings about public taste altogether.*
>
> *They are determined to force on to the huge TV audience Australian-made, although they know it is practically certain they would not compare with first quality imported shows.*[53]

The Government did nothing, and in July and August of 1964, a diverse group of individuals and representatives from trade union, academic and cultural circles met in Sydney to convene a gathering for the purpose of publicising and supporting the implementation of the Vincent Report recommendations. The idea of this 'National TV Congress' was publicly sponsored by well known individuals including both the Liberal Senator Vincent, and the Labor Senator Douglas McLelland, who had been Deputy Chairman of the Senate Committee. Eight university Professors, including Zelman Cowan, Leonie Kramer, Alan Stout and Sir Mark Oliphant gave their support, together with Albert Monk, President of the ACTU, and many other academics and writers.[54]

But Senator Vincent died in November 1964 and by the time the Congress was held in March 1965 it had developed strong political overtones. Senator George Hannan, the instigator of the inquiry, and a member of the Vincent Committee, was quoted in the Melbourne 'Age' when he refused to sponsor or attend the Congress because he believed it was 'heavily loaded against the Government politically'.[55] According to the Congress report, the Sydney media chose to ignore the event altogether:

> *... the Sydney Press, TV, and Radio Stations gave no advance news whatever concerning this important Congress, despite the fact that they had been provided with full information in a written statement by the Patron of the Congress, Alderman H.F. Jensen of Sydney.*[56]

Bill Perkins chaired a Congressional session when R.J. Thomson spoke on the possible effects of television, and on children's programs. In supporting the findings of the Vincent Inquiry Mr. Thomson attacked the system of commercial television and the influence that it had on program content because of its conflicting goals of 'audience arousal' and 'audience norm-conformity'. He was particularly concerned with the evidence from content analysis which showed a high level of irrational sensationalism and plot stereotyping in commercially produced television drama.[57]

But in nearly 10 years commercial television in Australia had become firmly entrenched. It had wide popular appeal, it had government support, and no amount of fragmented research, inconclusive academic opinion or occasional public protest seemed likely to make a difference to that.

The controversial Vincent Report disappeared from sight and so did any real attempts by the major commercial channels to develop worthwhile programs of appeal to children. In 1967 Adrian Jose noted:

> *... the decline in constructive children's programs that followed the upsurge in diversionary entertainment a few years ago ...*[58]

There was the ABC, and for those who found them there were the occasional creative series for children like Tim Burstall's 'Sebastian the Fox'. There was also Godfrey Philipp's 'Adventure Island', a series derived from ATV0's 'Magic Circle Club', and compered by Nancy Cato.

Nancy Cato was another who believed in the need for quality television for children:

> *As for 'mere' entertainment, it typifies the attitude which I most detest. Children deserve the BEST... The best writing, the best acting, the best direction and the best research. The usual conception of 'mere' entertainment, of mindless, barely comprehensible action and noise, of ideas that will not stand the most casual scrutiny - this is not good enough.*[59]

But television had a voracious appetite for material and rather than finding it provided them with the opportunities to develop ideas, some of the more creative people were swamped; swamped by the immediate need that had been created in Australia for time-filling, action-packed, mass entertainment.

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1 'Herald', 25/11/57

2 'Age', 28/8/56

3 'People',2/9/59

4 Letter, Virginia Gibbs, President, VCCFT, to R.G. Osborne, 5/10/59

5 Letter, R.G. Osborne to Virginia Gibbs, 7/10/59

6 Alice Paton, letter to the 'Age', 9/12/59

7 Letter, Jessie Frape to Alice Paton, 6/8/(year not legible) and Betty Rankin, Interview with Alice Paton, 6/9/83

8 R.J. Thomson, 'Television Crime-Drama', F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1959, p. 2

9 'Visual Aids Review', Vol.3, No. 3, December, 1962

10 David Martin, 'Television Tension Programmes', Australian Broadcasting Control Board, Melbourne, 1963, p. 79

11 ibid, p. 9

12 ibid, p. 80

13 ABCB, 'Television Program Preferences of Children', Research Report No 1/59, February 1959

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[15] ABCB Annual Report, 1964, p. 62

[16] Betty Rankin, Interview with Adrian Jose, 3/5/84

[17] Betty Rankin, Interview with Enid Shann, 19/9/84

[18] WAACFT Report, 1960-61

[19] Advisory Committee on Childrens Programs, Third Report to the ABCB, December, 1962, with Enid Shann's Papers, Melbourne University Archives

[20] ABCB Annual Report, 1962, p. 48

[21] Betty Rankin, Interview with Enid Shann, 19/9/84

[22] ABCB Annual Report, 1962, p. 48

[23] VCCFT Television Report, 22/5/59

[24] Letter, Enid Shann to Virginia Gibbs, 12/4/62

[25] Betty Rankin, Interview with Enid Shann, 19/9/84

[26] Betty Rankin, Interview with Joanne Priest, 15/11/84

[27] ibid

[28] Betty Rankin, Interview with Enid Shann, 19/9/84

[29] Betty Rankin, Interview with Joanne Priest, 15/11/84

[30] Letter, Joanne Priest to Alice Paton, 23/12/63

[31] ABCB Annual Report, 1965, p. 64

[32] NSW Association of University Women Graduates, 'An Appraisal of Children's Television', c. 1963

[33] ibid

[34] Debate in the Senate, 13/8/59

[35] 'Summary from Federal Parliamentary Debate', 17 and 18 August, 1960

[36] 'Age', 19/7/61

[37] The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Report from the Select Committee on the Encouragement of Australian Productions for Television, (the Vincent Report), 1963, pp. 2-3

[38] Vincent Report, 1963, pp. 59-60

[39] Submission from the ACCFT to the Senate Select Committee, 7/2/63

[40] QCCFT submission to Vincent Inquiry, February 1963

[41] Vincent Report, 1963, pp. 7-11

[42] ibid, p.12

[43] ibid, pp. 8, 36

[44] ibid, p. 34

[45] ibid, p. 34

[46] ibid, p. 37

[47] ibid, pp. 37-38

[48] ibid, p. 14

[49] Ibid, p. 16

[50] Ibid, pp. 17-31

[51] 'Daily Telegraph' Editorial, 25/9/63

[52] 'Sunday Telegraph' 29/9/63

[53] 'Sunday Telegraph', 29/9/63

[54] Program of the National TV Congress, March, 1965

[55] 'Age', 9/3/65

[56] Resolution of the National TV Congress, 21/3/65

[57] Address by Mr. R.J. Thomson, National TV Congress, 20/3/65

[58] Letter, Adrian Jose to Bill Perkins, 23/2/67

[59] Nancy Cato, the 'Age', TV - Radio Guide, March 1-7, 1968

Chapter 9

The ACCFT Becomes an Importer and Distributor of Children's Films

During the 1970s, by default rather than by design, the ACCFT entered the business of film importing and distribution. Without sufficient interest from the established film distributors in Australia it was seen as an essential move if a reasonable supply of children's films was to be maintained. In 1976 the Council became an incorporated non-profit making company, limited by guarantee.

This was a major turning point for the national organisation although as its business and financial responsibilities increased so did its difficulties in co-ordinating the activities of its independent and sometimes non-commercially minded state affiliates. They had differences over the selection of films, differences over distribution and exhibition schedules, and differences over the allocation of money which from 1969 had become available in the form of grants or loans from new government arts organisations.

At a turbulent ACCFT General Meeting in Hobart in 1975 Bill Perkins retired as President and for two years the national body was led by a Victorian, Edward Snell. In 1977 he was succeeded by another Tasmanian, Patricia Braithwaite who as honorary secretary of the ACCFT from 1965 to 1975 had already contributed much to the work of the Council.

With great tact and diplomacy Patricia Braithwaite was able to hold the Councils together, retaining their co-operation for what were to become the two major functions of the national organisation - the distribution and exhibition of children's films throughout Australia, and encouraging and co-ordinating the activities of affiliated State Councils.

A major change also occurred in South Australia after members of the SACFT decided that it was time for an organisational change and, prior to her resignation as President, May Mills presided over the amalgamation of the local Council with the South Australian School Libraries Association and other South Australian media organisations. A new body, the Society for Mass Media and Resource Technology (SMMART) was established.[1]

For a short time all South Australian affiliation with the ACCFT ceased, but in 1973 a new and very energetic group of South Australian parents emerged. Like their predecessors they were concerned with the poor quality of films and television available for their children and in February 1973, following a public meeting addressed by the ACCFT's Distribution and Promotions Officer, Elizabeth McDowall, they founded the South Australian Council for Children's Films and Television (SACCFT). The convener of the meeting, Max Pearson, the President of the South Australian Association of State

School Organisations Inc., was elected President of the new Council. Eileen Sharman, a member of the former SACFT, was appointed the convener of a film sub-committee and a newcomer, Barbara Biggins, convener for television.[2]

At the beginning of the decade the idea of producing children's films locally was still being promoted by the ACCFT. And in 1971 Henry Geddes and his wife Patricia Latham, a scriptwriter for the CFF, accepted an invitation from the Council to visit Australia to advise on local production, and on the promotion and screening of films from the British CFF.

The possibility of an Australian foundation making films for children had an immediate impact on eager producers who, on their own initiative, called on Henry Geddes prior to his departure from London. They received a cool reception and in a letter to Bill Perkins he wrote:

> *Making films for children is not a quick road to fortune. We have found that even with our considerable overseas sales, it cannot be a paying proposition, and it is for this reason that the British Film Industry subsidises us. I frankly do not see how the Australian Foundation could possibly prosper without full support from its film and television industry, the Government, or other altruistic interests.*[3]

The need for financial assistance to support local production was a point Mr. Geddes reiterated in the report he wrote following his Australian visit. However, while he considered sponsorship for production was essential, he could see no reason why children's films made in Australia could not eventually recover their costs providing there were sufficient outlets for screening them. Major distributors in Australia claimed there was no support for regular children's matinees like those held in the UK but he was not convinced, as he found during his visit that there were cinema managers interested in the idea, providing sufficient films could be made available.

Obviously a start had to be made somewhere and he suggested the need for a central organisation handling both 35 and 16 mm prints of children's films, with an efficient distribution system to ensure a continuous supply to the cinemas. At the time of his visit the CFF films in Australia were shared amongst Greater Union, the ACCFT, 16 mm Australia Pty, British Australian Central Film Bureau (BAC), and the television channels. There was no single organisation with the necessary financial and administrative resources willing to promote and distribute all CFF product. The distribution of the more recent 35 mm titles, for which the ACCFT had only just assumed responsibility, was being physically handled at the State Film centre in Victoria by Edwin Schefferle and VCCFT volunteers, with Patricia Braithwaite arranging the Australia-wide bookings from Tasmania.

On the production side, Mr. Geddes suggested that the costs of production in Australia could be recovered from 35 mm and 16 mm film screenings as well as from sales to television, and to overseas countries. He also explained the value of grants, donations and special discounts like those available for children's productions in Britain.

He felt confident that Australia could eventually make a valuable contribution to a world market in which he considered there was plentiful supply of films for adults, but very few for young audiences.[4]

Henry Geddes was an experienced producer of films for children, and he suggested several Australian themes around which exciting films could be made. A bushfire, survival in the bush, a sea serpent in Sydney Harbour which, with its flying boats, the Navy, ferry boats, hydrofoils, sailing boats, surfing, sharks, the opera house and the bridge was, he believed:

> *... without doubt the finest location I have ever seen for children's films ... Any self-respecting script writer should be able to come up with a dozen ideas in a weekend.*[5]

Elizabeth McDowall, a member of the VCCFT at this time, was inspired by Henry Geddes's enthusiasm and within a month she had persuaded Australian Paper Mills in Victoria to offer $1,000 for a prize-winning script for a children's film about a bushfire. The offer also included the provision of fire fighting equipment and personnel, as well as the fire.

But holding a competition for a script was a long way from actually producing a film and the proposal was met with a very cautious response from the Sydney-based ACCFT production sub-committee. It refused to endorse the venture unless it was professionally organised and received the approval of the Australian Writers' Guild Executive.[6]

The VCCFT decided to act independently[7] and arranged for the competition to be held in conjunction with Melbourne's 1972 Moomba celebrations. Entries were judged by Phillip Adams, Bill Perkins and, to overcome any objections from the Australian Writers' Guild, Patrick Tennison. The prize was awarded to a well-known writer Mona Brand, a member of the AWG and the Society of Authors.

The ACCFT production sub-committee offered to seek finance for production, but there was nothing left to pay an experienced script-editor who could develop a script from which costs could be estimated. The film was never made.

As a result of this experience the members of the production committee advised Australian writers to approach the new Film and Television Board for assistance with children's scripts, and to start with small-budget shorts of five to ten minutes' duration.[8]

The sub-committee itself had reached an impasse. It had received no money beyond the $1,000 granted by the ACA in 1969, and except for a few dedicated stalwarts its membership was constantly changing, making continuity difficult to maintain amongst its interested but busy supporters.

Over the years of its existence it attracted regular representation from the ABCB and the ABC, and it captured the interest of film and television identities such as producer John McCallum, a Vice-President of the ACCFT from 1969 to 1973, Godfrey Philipp, Roger Mirams, Nancy Cato, Phillip Adams and Yoram Gross. But without money and the support of the commercial film and television industries nothing could be achieved. A Newcastle businessman, Ron Fraser, who succeeded Frank Meaney as President of the Newcastle CCFT introduced ideas for raising funds from business organisations but his efforts were hampered by the ACCFT constitution which precluded it from receiving tax deductible donations.[9]

Other, unanticipated difficulties arose when the committee was confronted by a dilemma over the question of tariffs on films imported into Australia, which threatened its relationship with the actors and film-makers working for a revitalised Australian film production industry.

Two prominent committee members, Julie James Bailey and Ron Fraser, were unaware that since 1954 CFF films had been imported duty free, and they were embarrassed by the ACCFT's refusal to pay a $130 levy to assist the Australian Film Council in making a submission for protection to the 1972 Tariff Board inquiry. Not only did the Children's Film and Television Councils have little money to spare for the levy, they depended on the CFF films to use as features in their screenings, and the ACCFT remained adamant in refusing to support the Film Council case.

It was not that their enthusiasm for Australian films had diminished but Bill Perkins was alarmed by the prospect of changes to the status quo in order 'to protect a children's film production industry which does not exist'.[10] It was becoming more obvious as time went by that although the interest in reviving film production in Australia was increasing, the funding of a foundation to initiate the regular production of films for children was, for several reasons, not imminent. The policy of the new Australian Film Development Corporation was to invest in films which appeared to have a good chance of financial success and 'children's' films had never been placed in this category. Also, Australian producers did not have the financial resources to subsidise children's films as in Britain and it seemed most unlikely that the internationally owned distribution and exhibition companies in Australia would assume any responsibility for the production of films to be shown in competition with their own imported products.[11]

In August 1973 the ACCFT production sub-committee went into recess and Julie James Bailey and Ron Fraser joined a NSW organisation 'The Committee to Promote an Australian Children's Film Foundation'. A proposal to amalgamate the two committees and pool their meagre financial resources was later opposed by the ACCFT on constitutional grounds[12] and finally, in 1979, the ACCFT production sub-committee was officially disbanded.

The Australian Film Development Corporation, with an eye for international distribution, did send a script to Henry Geddes for comment but his response was not encouraging. He considered many of the essential ingredients of a successful film for children were missing; children were not the main characters in the story, adults were introduced with lengthy dialogue which 'would result in a mass exodus of our young audience', and flashbacks, which were confusing for young children, were too frequently used. The film, he wrote apologetically,

> *... might make a perfectly acceptable second feature but would need a vast amount of work to turn it into even an acceptable children's film.*[13]

But there were others, and in the 1970s 18 features were produced in Australia by several different local and international companies.[14]

One, 'Storm Boy', received wide acclaim and won the 1977 Australian Film Institute Best Film and Jury Prize as well as two international awards. The film, adapted by Sonia Borg from a children's book by South Australian writer Colin Thiele, was produced by the four-year-old South Australian Film Corporation in 1976. The production was described as:

> *... an act of faith in those who had been calling for Australian films suitable for children and out of enthusiasm for the quality of Colin Thiele's book.*[15]

Advice given to the Corporation by some sections of the local film industry was not encouraging: 'Storm Boy' would be unlikely to recover the cost of advertising, let alone the cost of production; it did not have the 'Disney' name, it did not have guaranteed outlets, and it would be screened to an audience paying half price for seats. To combat these difficulties an intensive campaign was undertaken to gain the support of schools and special interest groups, and educational material was prepared with two new editions of the story being published for cross-promotion. 'Storm Boy' was also advertised on television and radio, and in selected publications.[16]

Some of the other children's films of the 1970s also won Australian or international awards, either in open competition or specifically as 'children's' films. They were: Yoram Gross's live action and animated film, 'Dot and the Kangaroo', Noel Ferrier's 'Avengers of the Reef', Film Australia's 'Let the

Balloon Go', the South Australian Film Corporation's 'Blue Fin', and the Tasmanian Film Corporation's 'Manganinnie'.[17]

But these awards were based on adult opinion and without a systematic assessment of child responses and the circumstances under which the films were released and screened, a valuable learning opportunity was lost. In the end it was the immediate box office returns which remained the sole criterion for evaluating success or failure, and this remained a problem for children's films.

The ACCFT'S role gradually evolved to become that of ensuring that children's films remained available for screening by actively promoting, distributing, and encouraging the exhibition of both local and imported products in cinemas, and on television.

The 1969 ACA grant had allowed the ACCFT to distribute amounts of between $200 and $400 to its State and Regional Councils to help them establish regular screenings, but it was clearly stipulated by the ACA that most of its money was to be used for importing children's films.[18]

The first purchases, four new CFF features, were screened at children's sessions in Melbourne, Hobart, Adelaide, Canberra, Sydney and Newcastle. Nine 35 mm and two 16 mm colour prints of the Australian film 'They Found a Cave' were purchased for the low sum of $600. This also included the world television and cinema rights.[19] A further two CFF features were imported in 1971, making a total expenditure on films of $7,690. Now, with new titles to screen, some of the commercial cinemas showed renewed interest and before all the films had been shown in all states, or the potential for Saturday matinee screenings had been fully exploited, $3,351 had been earned by the Council.[20]

The ACA granted a further $6,000 for film purchases, and $1,000 to employ, on a part-time basis, a desperately needed Promotions and Distribution Officer. The handling of the films had become too much for Scheff to manage in his spare time and Elizabeth McDowall, who had participated in the organisation of several successful VCCFT holiday festivals in Melbourne, became the ACCFT's first paid employee. The Victorian State Film Centre provided office and storage space for the Council, and Elizabeth McDowall got to work sharing a basement with the Centre's film archives, and a desk with film-maker Richard Franklin. She found it exciting, even in this limited space, to have the opportunity to establish a permanent and recognisable home for a collection of entertainment films for children for the first time in Australia.[21]

The Rank Overseas Organisation in London was a little nervous about the whole enterprise but Henry Geddes was confident and negotiated more favourable rates for the ACCFT's CFF purchases by temporarily reducing the royalty payments on the 35 mm films they acquired.[22]

In 1972 further financial assistance of $7,000 came from the ACA, and with ACCFT revenue of $4,500, a further five CFF features and two series were purchased. In July 1973 Elizabeth McDowall was able to report that in two years the ACCFT had accumulated a library of 17 features and 18 shorts. From these $8,000 had been earned from hiring out single films or complete programs, mainly to the State Councils. Some of the commercial exhibitors, particularly the Village Theatres chain, were also making regular use of the films in their Saturday matinees.[23]

In 1973 the CFF granted the ACCFT five-year 16 mm. distribution rights to the 35 mm titles it had already acquired, thus making exhibition possible in areas where 35 mm projection facilities did not exist.[24] It also meant greater autonomy for the State Councils when, in response to mounting criticism over distribution and the choice of titles, the ACCFT was able to separate its 35 mm and 16 mm operations. Control of the 35 mm market was retained nationally, and packages of the ACCFT's 16 mm films were rotated amongst the states for the Councils to use as they wished. Fifty per cent of the income earned from these was returned to the ACCFT.

It was a financial arrangement which enabled two State Councils, Victoria and South Australia, to accumulate funds for purchasing some 16 mm features and shorts of their own choice, as well as making an important contribution to ACCFT administrative costs and further ACCFT film purchases. But the same interest and expertise in the distribution and exhibition of films did not exist in all Councils. These voluntary organisations continued to attract people, for short or long periods, who were unanimous in their criticism of the lack of suitable film and television entertainment for children, but they frequently lacked the knowledge or the experience with which to pursue positive and realistic goals, and they were rarely unanimous in their support for the geographically remote, Melbourne-based ACCFT. Despite the circulation of regular newsletters and reports it remained largely unknown to the members of its affiliated organisations.

Some quite clearly would have preferred to operate independently and spontaneously in responding to what they believed were the needs and interests of their children and, where it existed, in taking advantage of support from local institutions. Their screenings were held during regional arts festivals, and through community art and craft groups, film societies, schools or regular children's film clubs. And school holidays became a popular time for special events. It created a rather fragmented approach to film distribution but, despite the difficulties of continuity, and the limited commercial expertise of the voluntary organisers, it was through these diverse outlets that the ACCFT was able to develop its Australia-wide distribution service with clients ranging from its own State Councils to some of the big commercial exhibitors.

In the small state of Tasmania Bill Perkins's influence and energy guaranteed that a high level of interest in films for children would be maintained and that the use of CFF films would continue, although the personal endorsement of the TCCFT remained an important factor in their success. After investigating a decline in audiences for holiday screenings in 1976 the Council found that merely to promote the films through regular commercial outlets was not sufficient. The Tasmanian community had come to expect that the Council would be directly involved in these events.[25]

In 1977 Bill Perkins's service to Australian film and television was recognised with the award of Member of the Order of Australia, and in 1979 his 24 years as President of the TCCFT came to an end when he retired from the Council he had founded in 1954. Patricia Braithwaite was elected his successor.

In Victoria the VCCFT also made good use of CFF product and found that a regular supply of new features enabled it to become financially independent. It meant that the Council was able to continue to fulfill its long-term objective of demonstrating the popularity and the potential of special films for children, although it was still difficult to influence members of the commercial film industry. For no matter how well accepted the CFF films might have been by audiences of children, the screening of special films had several disadvantages for commercial exhibitors.

The programming for weekly matinees was traditionally done through film exchanges, and as profits were assured by a cheap 'flat rate hire' the titles were relatively unimportant to many of the programmers. Also, when exhibitors were tied to specific distributors they were expected to make use of film packages purchased overseas. They were not accustomed to handling features of one hour, which CFF research and VCCFT experience had indicated was an appropriate length for young children. The CFF films had other disadvantages: the titles were unknown to the general community, they were not accompanied by money for advertising, and the lack of multiple prints precluded opportunities for 'splash' releases, with a title released simultaneously at several outlets. This was a strategy that had the benefit of ensuring that a film became familiar to a large number of people of all ages in a very short time, and it required a minimum amount of expenditure on advertising.[26]

Some cinema managers were converted, but commercial interest in children's films continued to be low during the 1970s when most attention was being given to developing the highly profitable drive-in theatres, and the 'art' circuit.[27]

However, while there were young children and their parents responding favourably to their programs the members of the VCCFT were inspired to continue with their monthly Film Club, and especially with their May holiday screenings. Like the children of the 1960s, the children of the 1970s flocked to the VCCFT 'festivals', with over 20,000 attending each year until 1974.[28]

The Council handled most of the promotion and advertising for these and provided volunteers as organisers and ushers. Mass media advertising was too expensive so the Council relied on editorial comment from newspaper journalists, and on the pamphlets and posters which, with the permission of the Victorian Education Department, they distributed personally to primary schools.

> *For weeks before the May holidays I drove my car with boxes of pamphlets and programs in the boot - for delivery to every school in the district - so that every primary school child would take a program home.*
>
> *The Dendy Brighton was the venue of many May holiday festivals - with (the Manager) Mr. Ward's guidance VCCFT members and their teenagers became volunteer ushers (and baby-sitters). My own children saw every film several times. Their great favourite was 'Skybike' and the remainder of the holidays they were dreaming of making their bicycles fly!*[29]

This participation in the community was regarded as essential, and the VCCFT President Rosemary Farrow wrote in her Report for 1977:

> *It would be a pity if our organisation was to become just a distribution centre for children's films. I think it is most important for our members to be seen in the community, helping where our films are screening and aiding in the formation of local children's film clubs ... Through these activities we gain support for our efforts to improve the standard of children's films and television.*[30]

But the world of visual entertainment was changing rapidly and towards the end of the 1970s the cinema audiences for children's films, like those for adults, declined markedly.

VCCFT holiday screenings at suburban shopping centres continued to attract children although increasingly they were being used by parents as child minding opportunities rather than for the films themselves.[31]

It meant a marked decline in income for the VCCFT, which in the four years from 1972 to 1975 had takings from its May holiday screenings alone totalling $31,523.[32] And the other rewards, for the adults who had participated in the magic of large cinemas filled with excited and eager children, had also gone. The big suburban cinemas no longer existed, voluntary workers were becoming hard to find, and the publicity from the personally delivered individual pamphlets had been replaced by paid-for advertising. Fortunately for the future of the Victorian Council, the decrease in income from 35 mm screenings at this time was off-set to some extent by an increase in 16 mm film hire, particularly to schools.

The NSWCCFT, which had never shown much enthusiasm for organising regular cinema screenings, preferred other activities. Joan Brennan, who was elected President in 1969, expressed the view that she was not entirely happy for her Council to be simply exhibiting films to Sydney children: -

> *... it (the NSWCCFT) is not expanding in the manner which I would desire. We are now a commercial enterprise with arty crafty overtones, providing entertainment for children whom I consider are indulged in every department - particularly entertainment.*[33]

Joan Brennan was particularly concerned by the amount of time children were spending with television and believed that the ACCFT should be concentrating more on that medium.[34] However, when successful screenings at the 1972 Waratah Festival resulted in an offer to the NSWCCFT to use the Music Room at the new Opera House for regular programs, it was joyfully accepted: '... all we need is lots of films of course.'[35]

Nine months later the NSWCCFT reported that the lack of variety, and the limited number of films available was making it difficult to maintain regular sessions. Attendances at screenings in Sydney varied markedly and Joan Brennan concluded that films from the CFF had lost their appeal, especially for older children.

> *We feel that our children should be encouraged to develop broader entertainment tastes and these films have changed very little in concept over the past 25 years. It becomes increasingly difficult to present these films with enthusiasm.*[36]

But it was inevitable that, despite this sort of criticism, CFF features would be the basis around which ACCFT film distribution was built. They filled a need for films designed specifically for children, and children enjoyed them. They were of a high standard technically, the dialogue was in English, they did not require expensive dubbing or sub-titles, the supply was regular, and they were available to the ACCFT at a realistic price. It was possible to introduce variety to children's programs with shorts, but as far as the ACCFT was concerned, no comparable source of features existed.

That did not stop the Council from continuing to look for new material and with the assistance of a Churchill Fellowship awarded to her in 1975 Elizabeth McDowall went in search of more films. After visiting seven countries, including North America where she found that 'family' rather than 'children's' films were still considered adequate, she returned home firmly convinced that Australia should be making its own.[37]

The NSWCCFT tried exhibiting films from a variety of sources but with only moderate success, particularly when unfamiliar titles were shown. In the 1975 May holidays an international collection which had done well with school groups in Perth and Adelaide was poorly attended at all of the four venues at which it was shown in Sydney. It may have been the number of alternative holiday activities available at the time, or the good weather, but complaints were made about the sub-titles and according to the manager of one theatre, that was the reason why many parents refused to buy tickets.[38]

As an alternative to film exhibition NSWCCFT members were keen to encourage an interest in film-making by children, and they provided equipment and tutors to work with small groups. The first session was conducted by film-maker Gil Brealey, and Joan Brennan reported:

> *It is too early yet to see if we are justified in entering this field, but I personally feel that the proper appreciation of the art of the film comes from a knowledge and understanding of the art of the film maker.*[39]

Bill Childs, Senior Project Officer of the Film, Radio and Television Board succeeded Joan Brennan as President of the NSWCCFT and in 1976 wider recognition was given to the Council in its own state. Money from the NSW government paid for a part-time Promotions and Distribution Officer, the NSW Film Council agreed to provide handling facilities for 16 mm films, and the NSW Education Department Films Approval Committee invited the submission of CFF films for assessment.[40]

The NSWCCFT now appeared eager to accept responsibility for distributing 16 mm films from the ACCFT's collection[41] but in the long-term it made little difference, and over the next three years only limited use was made of the films placed with the Council in NSW.[42]

Meanwhile, although the new SACCFT was extremely successful in encouraging the screening of children's films in South Australia, difficulties of another kind arose with its independently-minded members who, in their eagerness to provide for children, believed they should have control of all CFF films screened in their state. It was a responsibility the ACCFT was unable to relinquish as vital links were being established with commercial exhibitors, and it was essential for the national body to retain control of distribution nationally.[43]

To the embarrassment and considerable surprise of the ACCFT the SACCFT responded by applying directly to the ACA's Film and Television Board for a grant to import its own films.[44] The request created a dilemma for the ACA which it resolved after consultation with both organisations by granting a further $5,000 to the ACCFT to assist the SACCFT in establishing its own library of 16 mm titles.[45]

There were more surprises which were to have unfortunate repercussions for the ACCFT when again, without reference to its national body, the SACCFT applied to the Film and Television Board for a grant of $5,000 for Eileen Sharman to organise an international children's film festival for Adelaide.[46] The Board was aware of tensions developing between the ACCFT and the SACCFT but it was interested in the potential that such an event might have for developing Australian contacts with overseas film-makers and although it refused the SACCFT's request for a grant it agreed to guarantee the festival against any loss.[47]

The festival was successfully staged and the following year, with the encouragement and the financial assistance of the Board, a second international collection was gathered by Eileen Sharman. Other State Councils joined in, and the films were also shown in Canberra and all state capitals except Brisbane.

It was a once only event. Venue limitations, which in the interests of commercial distributors were imposed on all officially endorsed international festivals, and which the ACCFT as the official Australian member of the ICFCYP was obliged to uphold, precluded further Australia-wide festivals of this kind. Also, the personality clashes and confusion which arose with geographically isolated individuals corresponding between Hobart, Adelaide, Fremantle, Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, London and Paris served to undermine, in the eyes of the Film and Television Board, the reputation of the ACCFT as a national authority with the ability to co-ordinate the activities of its affiliated Councils.[48]

The SACCFT international children's festival continued as a biennial event in Adelaide only, with assistance from the South Australian government.[49]

In the west, and in the north of Australia, the isolation of the WAACFT and the QCCFT continued to have an impact on their activities as freight for films was expensive, and personal contact with members of the ACCFT remained limited.

However, the perceived need for children's films was not confined to the south-eastern corner of the continent and after several quiet years the WAACFT was re-activated by a group of people keen to introduce regular film screenings for children in Perth. They changed the name of their 'Association' to 'Council' to bring it into line with the other states and they renewed contact with the ACCFT, after finding their local commercial distributors were reluctant to hire out films which they might need for their own school holiday programs.

Despite earlier popularity, in the 1970s CFF films were an unknown quantity in the west and the Council members had no idea how Western Australian children would respond to them. It '... needed courage to fly 35 mm films 2,500 miles to one screening', but they were determined to try.[50]

The experiment succeeded and '... after two or three titles from CFF the children just came whatever the name of the film.'[51]

From a modest start in the small cinema at the Perth Institute of Film and Television (PIFT) the new children's film club expanded to other larger venues and after an office was established in the PIFT building, weekday screenings were also held for school groups.

The 16 mm films provided a source of income for the WACCFT and enabled the Council to respond to requests for films from country regions up to 2,000 miles away

> *... during the last term of 1976 we had a print on a plane, boat and train simultaneously every week ... We have several requests from areas well beyond the railway line, and have to rely on the friendliness of the local station owner to transport the films. We send them well bound, in clearly marked cases and hope that the wording - CHILDREN'S FILMS - has some impact on the sympathies of the courier.*[52]

'Moving Pictures', another WACCFT venture, was mounted in conjunction with PIFT, and in November 1978 a collection of children's films was taken 1300 kilometres, to six south-west country centres in 11 days. During that time 21 film screenings were attended by a total of 3,300 primary school children.[53]

A similar tour of the Kimberleys was organised the following year, using films from the ACCFT's 1979 international 'Carnival' collection.

Some of the children had not seen films before, and few had seen television. In Wyndham, 3,000 kilometres from Perth, many Aboriginal children attended the screenings, some travelling from Hall's Gap 375 kilometres away and staying overnight at local camps. At this venue one of the few Australian films in the collection, 'Three Dances by Gulpilil', had to be withdrawn after a preview screening for tribal elders. They explained that as many of the young people from local tribes were yet to be initiated, it was forbidden for them to see other tribal dances, or markings and sign language.

The children in the Australian outback were enthralled by the films:

> *The children's response to the films was incredible. They became involved with the characters, stood and clapped if a part pleased them and hid behind me or their teacher and peeped from behind us if something created tension or fear. They voted 'Mad Dog Gang' as the best feature and 'Me and You Kangaroo' as the best short.*[54]

The enthusiasm and energy with which the Western Australians approached children's films during this period, and the number of screenings of 16 mm films they managed to organise, was reflected in their financial return to the ACCFT. In 1979 this, despite the small and widely scattered population, was $3,278 which compared very favourably with $7,612 from South Australia and only $1,350 from NSW.[55]

By contrast, the QCCFT was responsible for only one major screening annually. It was a profitable function but meant that when it came to participating in an event such as the 'Carnival', which required several distribution outlets, the few available Council members were without the support of established links with local organisations, unlike the other states.[56]

The 'Carnival' was one of the responses by the ACCFT to the overall decline in cinema attendances during the 1970s and after Village Theatres, which controlled the largest group of hard-tops in Australia, discontinued regular Saturday matinees in outer suburban and country areas. Heavily promoted special events seemed to be the answer.[57]

The ACCFT's first experience of a 'commercial-type' release had come in 1975 when 'Rangi's Catch', a CFF film produced in New Zealand, was released as an 80-minute feature for Australia and New Zealand. It was launched with the assistance of the VCCFT and its Promotions and Distribution Officer, Peter Benn. A well-publicised special preview in Melbourne was attended by the British actor, Jimmy Edwards, who had featured in several CFF films, and as four copies of the film had been leased from Rank it was then screened at nine suburban outlets in Melbourne over the May school holidays.

Similar support was given to the film in Tasmania where seven out of ten primary school age children saw it in two weeks. In four weeks the costs of importing the film had been recouped.[58]

The opportunity for the ACCFT to try another commercial-type release arose when it purchased four prints of another CFF feature 'Fern, the Red Deer' in 1978. This film was released at an Australian premiere in Hobart accompanied by a strong promotional campaign arranged by Patricia Braithwaite's TCCFT in conjunction with Tasmanian Drive-In Theatre Holdings.[59]

A 'mini-splash' release was arranged for 'Fern' in Victoria, with the assistance of the VCCFT:

> *... we (the ACCFT and VCCFT) had to learn how to make TV commercials with the help of Village ... we ended up paying for most of it. We had to guarantee money up-front for advertising costs ... but it did give us an opportunity to produce posters etc. and set up screenings for the future ...*[60]

'Fern, the Red Deer' was given wider distribution when it was included as one of the features in the ACCFT's 'International Film Carnival' - a collection of children's films gathered from 10 countries, which travelled Australia-wide. This time the travelling international collection received official endorsement from the ICFCYP as some of the films were leased and others were purchased outright to remain in Australia as part of the ACCFT's permanent collection. The Carnival was assisted financially with a loan from the Australian Film Commission, and Village Theatres co-operated by making nine cinemas available for hire in NSW, as well as 23 in Victoria and five in Tasmania.

Elizabeth McDowall was the national co-ordinator of this venture and she was assisted by local co-ordinators in each state. The support of state education departments was sought and in most cases successfully obtained. One notable exception was in NSW where the Film Review Committee of the NSW Education Department rejected two of the features, 'Mad Dog Gang' from New Zealand and 'Boat Ahoy' from Czechoslovakia. Altogether the response to the Carnival in NSW was disappointing as only 9,909 attended; a very low figure compared with 17,471 in South Australia, 13,927 in Tasmania and 40 404 in Victoria.

But in nine months the Carnival films were shown to 100,000 Australian children who

> *... shared the excitement of sailing down the Danube with the young actors in the Czecholovakian film 'Boat Ahoy' ... heard the eerie cry of 'The Lone Wolf' echo through the rugged, snow-capped mountains of Yugoslavia ... had the chance to learn from the young New Zealand children in 'Mad Dog Gang' not to judge without first seeking the truth*

and in 'Fern, the Red Deer'

> *... recognised with those on the screen that wild animals, however tame, must be given a chance to live in their natural environment.*[61]

Queensland missed out in 1979 but the overall success of the event was a triumph for the ACCFT as it was the first time it had successfully co-ordinated a national event amongst its state affiliates, with their diverse aims and abilities, and very different audiences of children.

The Council in Queensland remained more concerned with the introduction of media education to schools as a means of encouraging critical viewing of films and television by children, due largely to the interest of its long-standing President, Dr. Rupert Goodman.[62] But as far as the ACCFT was concerned film and media education at a national level became the responsibility of the Australian

Society for Education in Film and Television (ASEFT), once it was established with 500 foundation members.[63]

And the other issue, changes to the censorship system, declined as a major interest for the ACCFT when the 'R' certificate was introduced in 1971. It was of little value for those who were still concerned about children seeing 'unsuitable' films as it did nothing to prevent them attending films classified for mature audiences, but rather than delay the implementation of the new legislation which had taken so long to achieve, they agreed that responsibility would have to remain with parents.[64]

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[7] Letter, Bill Perkins to Henry Geddes, 18/10/71

[8] Report from production sub-committee, 1972

[9] Letter, JulieJames Bailey to Bill Perkins, 25/7/73

[10] Letters between Bill Perkins and JulieJames Bailey, 27/6/72 - 5/8/72

[11] Letter, Senator Douglas McClelland, Minister for the Media, to Bill Perkins, 27/4/73

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Chapter 10

Quotas, Points, Inquiries and Regulations for Television

As both film and television entertainment proliferated 'the responsibility of parents' became a familiar slogan and it was used frequently by the television and advertising industries when responding to their critics. But although parents always had the options of not owning a television set, or of supervising and controlling its use in their own homes, the influence of television was pervasive and it was quite impossible to avoid. Television, especially commercial television, with its extensively promoted on-camera 'stars' and programs, and its sensational and titillating events, was compelling, and it had become an integral part of daily life for Australian families.

The first advocates of children's programs became disillusioned. They felt they had achieved very little with television[1] but the intervention did not end there as they were gradually replaced by other, younger parents who shared their beliefs that films and television were influential, particularly with respect to children, and that they should be a shared responsibility. They, like their predecessors, were not convinced that the film and television industries in Australia were playing their part.

Despite earlier comment by the Vincent Committee, members of the television industry continued to quote audience ratings as an indication of the success of television. But criticism over the amount and nature of television advertising, the frequent product and program promotions directed at children, and the failure of programmers to take initiatives in developing a variety of programs for children continued. So did criticism over the amount of violence, both real and fictional, which continued to be a feature of movies, drama series, and news services, and which was highlighted through the late afternoon and early evening with frequent channel promotions.

Few channels employed specialist staff to advise on the production, selection and scheduling of programs for children, and industry consultation with the community appears to have been slight.

The Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS), which had been speaking on behalf of the television industry since 1960, continued to fulfil the objectives of its charter which included the promotion and development of television broadcasting, and the formulation of a code of practice for the industry. It was a charter that also required it:

> *To protect and defend the rights and interests of the licensed television stations, individually and collectively*

and

> *To promote or oppose legislative or other measures affecting television broadcasting, and oppose any restriction or interference.*[2]

They were objectives difficult to reconcile with expectations that members of the industry would be responsive to directions from an apparently toothless and under-staffed controlling authority, or to criticism from the public.

Julie James Bailey presented a report on television at a public session of the ACCFT's Seventh Biennial Conference in Sydney in 1971. She said that although pre-school children had been well catered for on metropolitan channels, only about 30 minutes of Australian-made material was provided for school-age children each week. She described a positive response by the ABCB to representations from the entertainment unions and the NSWCCFT which, she claimed, influenced their demand for four hours of Australian made programs for school children each month. These programs, it was stipulated, were to be shown at times when children would be available to watch them.[3]

Quotas alone were not expected to guarantee quality and so the ABCB established a second Children's Advisory Committee 'to make recommendations concerning types of programs likely to interest children in the various school-age groups.'[4]

The first Advisory Committee had comprised people from different areas of education; the second was more broadly based. Three members, John Appleton, Julie Bailey and Godfrey Philipp all had experience in television production and Naomi Marks ran a children's theatre in Melbourne. Keith Cairns, the Executive Director of HSV7 in Melbourne and the Chairman of FACTS, was also a member.

The Committee stated that former programs had failed to take account of children as children and were:

> *... offering them scaled-down emasculated and abridged versions of adult entertainment which ignore the proportions, priorities and rhythm of childhood and set unfortunate limits upon the exercise of imagination which ought to play a crucial part in a child's development.*[5]

In the expectation of a response from the channels it undertook the complex task of defining detailed guidelines for future productions. These ranged from suggestions for program personnel to production techniques and topics likely to be of interest to children. Suggestions were also made for children's drama, standards for advertising to children, the need to publicise children's programs, and for audience research.[6]

Meanwhile, over the two years that it took the Committee to prepare and publish its report there were parents and teachers around Australia who were looking at television, and at the ways in which their children were responding to the medium.

At an Adelaide primary school one of the mothers, Barbara Biggins talked with other concerned parents. It disturbed them that the range of programs provided for children was so limited, and that there was little from which they could choose. A radio announcement for the meeting to discuss the formation of a children's film and television council in South Australia attracted Barbara Biggin's attention, and at that meeting in 1973 when the SACCFT was established, she was appointed the convener of its television sub-committee.

'We didn't want to set ourselves up as some sort of elitist group' and so as its first task the sub-committee sought wider input with a simple survey of the well patronised South Australian parents' clubs. The sample was biased towards parents who were involved in their children's activities, and this was acknowledged by the committee, but even so its members were surprised at just how unified the responses were. About 70% indicated dissatisfaction with the quality of television for children, and the reasons offered were remarkably similar. About 80% expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of advertising.[7]

It was sufficient evidence for the SACCFT sub-committee, advised by the Australian Children's Television Action Committee (ACTAC) from Victoria, to set up groups to monitor television programs and increase their contacts with interested parent groups and schools.[8] In 1974 Barbara Biggins went overseas for 12 months with her family. She saw a lot of television in Britain, and realised for the first time just what its possibilities were. She discovered that there were experienced children's program-makers like John Craven, Monica Sims and Patrick Dowling who actually had a philosophy behind their productions which had enabled them to develop clearly defined and positive reasons for what they were doing. She returned to South Australia with high expectations.[9]

Victoria's early interest in television had declined in the late 1960s. Enid Shann had returned to teaching and although the VCCFT continued to hear isolated complaints from the community there was no co-ordinated or sustained effort by members. At that time most of them were participating in the more rewarding work associated with exhibiting films to children.[10]

In 1969 a new member, Merle James, who was also a member of the Australian National Television Council (ANTC) informed the Council of attempts to revive the Vincent Report and examine the ABCB

Program Standards,[11] but it was not until October 1971 that the VCCFT re-established its television sub-committee and she was appointed the convener.[12]

This renewed interest in television attracted new members to the VCCFT and $1,000 was made available from general funds to cover their expenses as they embarked on several projects. The name Australian Children's Television Action Committee (ACTAC) was adopted by the sub-committee and it became an affiliated member of Action for Children's Television (ACT) in the United States. Monitoring groups were established by ACTAC, television programs were publicly criticised, research reports from Australia and overseas were studied, and in December 1973, a detailed and uncompromising report criticising many aspects of television in Australia was presented by ACTAC to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Science and the Arts.

After concluding that '... the aims of commercial television and the well-being of children in this country are incompatible' ACTAC suggested that an independent children's film and television foundation be established to produce and import programs for children in Australia.[13]

The VCCFT gave a further $1,000 to its sub-committee, although its independent actions, and the outspoken and confronting style of some of its members were beginning to generate unease amongst the more conservative members of the Council. They expressed concern that ACTAC's need for money came at a time when the VCCFT's revenue from film exhibition was declining, and suggested that its national and international activities were inappropriate for the sub-committee of a State Council. Finally, in the middle of 1974, the VCCFT provided ACTAC with a further $500 to establish itself as an independent organisation, and the two groups had an acrimonious parting.[14]

Subsequently, an invitation from the ACCFT to ACTAC to affiliate nationally as an advisory and independent body was declined on the grounds that the $40 affiliation fee could be put to better use.[15]

The VCCFT's interest in television gained new life when in April 1976 Sarah Guest joined the Council as a representative of the Free Kindergarten Union. She found herself quickly at work as the convener of a VCCFT 'Forum on Family Viewing' which the Council had been planning for the following September.[16]

The Forum was held in Melbourne on two successive nights and featured 17 speakers including, Dr. Ken O'Bryan from Ontario's Communications Authority, and an adviser on 'Sesame Street'. For Sarah Guest it marked the beginning of several years of activity in support of children's television at a time when the ABCB, restricted by a shortage of experienced research staff, could only conduct limited small-scale surveys. It reported that it was unable to undertake the comprehensive research it regarded as essential for the development of policy and long-term planning[17]

The second ABCB's Children's Advisory Committee had been disbanded and so no officially appointed specialist body remained to assess the responses made by the channels to the quota for children's programs, or to the points system which had been introduced to encourage the production of high quality Australian and minority audience material.[18]

In an attempt to draw attention to other issues Bill Childs, President of the NSWCCFT, compiled a guide for parents, advertisers and television stations. It quoted an ABCB circular letter (T 84) which referred to three previous letters dealing with television programming schedules:

> *... the Board again finds it necessary to write to stations about the televising of unsuitable material in family and children's viewing time, particularly between 4.00 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. The Board continues to receive many complaints about the televising during this period, of advertisements for magazines intended for adults, promotional material for cinema films and 'AO' and 'A' classified television films, and explicit discussions about serious social issues such as abortion, homosexuality and drug taking.*[19]

It was acknowledged that no one had to watch commercial television - the ABC existed as an alternative. But although it was without the much criticised advertising, it offered little for Australian children of primary school age beyond the programs it transmitted during the day for use in schools.

The children's variety series 'Adventure Island' was unexpectedly terminated by the ABC in 1972, a move that drew criticism from the ACCFT. But the Council was reassured when told of plans for a series of ABC produced dramas adapted for television from children's books, starting with 'A Taste for Blue Ribbons'.[20] And at the ACCFT'S Ninth Biennial Conference in May 1975 the ABC's Director of Young People's Programs, Kay Kinane, was happy to point out that despite limited funds her organisation was still doing something positive for children.[21] By November she was appealing to Patricia Braithwaite and the ACCFT for help. The ABC's new Controller of Television, John Cameron, had asked her to discontinue the children's dramas as he wanted to produce 'family' rather than 'children's' programs. He believed that programs for younger children should not be made locally as it was cheaper to buy them from overseas, and he wanted the Young People's Department disbanded.[22] Protests were made to the ABC and subsequently, although the Young People's Department survived, its drama section in Melbourne was dismantled, leaving no facilities to continue with the anticipated series. Sarah Guest reported to the VCCFT that a letter to John Cameron had elicited the response that it was scarcely a matter of concern for persons or organisations outside the ABC.[23]

Several changes were made to the ABC's afternoon program schedule, and a disillusioned Kay Kinane went on extended leave to Europe.[24]

The simmering unrest gained momentum after an Advisory Committee appointed by the ABCB to review all of its 20-year-old program standards, produced a wide-ranging report in February 1976. The Committee, chaired by Dr. Patricia Edgar, a Senior Lecturer in the Media Centre at La Trobe University, had made a total of 74 recommendations, several of which related to children's programs and advertising on television.[25]

The Government moved quickly and by April it had requested its Postal and Telecommunications Department to conduct an inquiry into the entire system of broadcasting in Australia. Interested bodies and individuals, including organisations directly involved in broadcasting, submitted 621 formal submissions. There were also letters, petitions and informal submissions reflecting the views of 'a wide range of organisations and members of the general public'.[26] The ACCFT, and the Children's Film and Television Councils in the ACT, South Australia, and Victoria all contributed their views on children's television.

In November, the Minister for Posts and Telecommunications, the Honourable Eric Robinson, announced that as a result of the inquiry the ABCB would be replaced by a new broadcasting authority, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT). In formally distancing the Government from any licensing decisions in the future, he also announced that the new independent Tribunal would have the power to control the licensing of all commercial and public broadcasting stations. It would hold public licence inquiries as well as inquiries into broadcasting issues, the first of which would deal with the self-regulation of broadcasting.[27]

Members of the ACCFT were apprehensive. The ABCB had not been very effective but with such sudden and sweeping changes they wanted to know what would become of recommendations made by the Edgar Committee which they had supported. Who would be appointed to the Tribunal? And why, in view of their past performances, should the commercial television licensees be given the responsibility of regulating themselves?[28]

Their apprehension was in no way allayed when a busy Barbara Biggins, in the middle of the school holidays, found that an advertisement published in the Adelaide 'Advertiser' on 20 January informed the public that written submissions for the 'Self-regulation Inquiry' had to be received by 25 February.[29]

In the short time available the SACCFT television sub-committee was able to prepare a joint SACCFT/ACCFT submission, leaving the other State Councils to decide whether or not they would develop their own written submissions according to local circumstances, and give oral evidence to the Tribunal as it sat in each State. The ACT, NSW, Queensland, Tasmanian and Victorian Councils all decided to take part.

This inquiry was conducted by the new Tribunal members including the Chairman, well-known commercial television identity, Bruce Gyngell. After the hearings and prior to the Tribunal's presentation of its report to the Government, Barbara Biggins was not very optimistic about the outcome. She expressed her belief that the chief issues at stake were political and financial and that children's television would simply be regarded as a 'side issue'.[30] And Sarah Guest, conscious of the difficulties for the new Tribunal of steering a course between 'public pressure and political possibility', expressed her thoughts in a letter to the 'Australian':

> *Now that the ABCB has vanished (baby, bath water and all), its very name expunged from the public memory, and we are occupied (once more) with discussing community standards and children's television.*
>
> *... The issue of self-regulation has been dominated by the peripheral practicalities of implementing such a system. Little time has been given to the philosophical questions about a system based on complaint, or the onus this will place on the public.*
>
> *... So we wait for Mr. Gyngell to wrap up his parcels: a little one for children and a big one for FACTS - or can we hope for the reverse?* [31]

Unexpectedly, the Self-regulation Inquiry showed children's television to be a very prominent and contentious issue throughout Australia and Janet Strickland, one of the three Tribunal members, subsequently wrote:

> *During our journeying around Australia, no other single subject evoked such a wide range of responses or revealed such a dichotomy of opinion amongst both parents and educators, social psychologists and welfare administrators, children's television activists and the commercial broadcasting industry.*[32]

And in 1978, when appearing before a Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, Mr. R. Casey, General Manager of HSV7 in Melbourne said:

> *Quite frankly, it would be reasonable to say that the industry was surprised at the great accent which emerged throughout Australia through the (ABT) hearings. There was much discussion about children's television. We thought there would be a lot of discussion about many things but there is no doubt that children's television developed as the central issue of that inquiry.*[33]

In its written submission to the Self-regulation Inquiry the VCCFT had described programming for children by the commercial channels in Melbourne during 1975. It was quoted in the ABT Report:

> *So far, commercial stations have provided for children by supplying them with a series of cartoons and situation comedies (handed down from adult time slots when they cease to rate). During 1975, in the important after-school period reserved for children and family viewing, 20 American situation comedy series were repeated and 21 American cartoon series were screened. This cannot be described as a wide variety of shows; there was little or nothing which would show children a realistic picture of life in Australia, no local documentaries, and nothing for migrant children. The situation comedies and cartoons have one thing in common, they attract all age groups. What is needed are shows which recognise the different interests and needs of different age groups.*[34]

And there was more, from individuals and groups who criticised advertising to children, the excessive promotion of goods within children's programs, and the promotion of 'A' and 'AO' programs at times when children were known to be viewing.[35]

In response to the 'extremely large' number of submissions concerned with children's television FACTS had supplied a long and detailed supplementary paper to the Inquiry. It stated that under FACTS' proposed system of self-regulation the matter would be given 'careful consideration',[36] but the Tribunal concluded that:

> *During the Inquiry the industry did indicate some awareness of the concern about children's programs expressed by many individuals, community groups and experts. The industry also indicated a willingness to make some changes in response to this concern.*
>
> *However, the proposals put forward by the industry were not considered adequate in the light of the expressed public concern in this area. The Tribunal, as a*

> *consequence, was not convinced that major changes would occur without the imposition of firm requirements on stations.*[37]

As a result of the evidence presented to it the Tribunal decided that

> *... a self-regulatory system could not be applied to all areas of broadcasting because of the natural conflict between the needs of commercial organisations and the interests of the public. The community could not reasonably expect broadcasters to immediately regulate themselves in such areas as Australian content, children's programs or advertising where their necessary and justifiable desire for profits could be in conflict with their acknowledged social responsibilities.*[38]

Soon after the publication of the Tribunal's Report a children's film and television seminar was held in Canberra. In an opening address the Deputy Director of the Australian Film and Television School, Storry Walton, commented that the Seminar marked an 'unprecedented union' between the Australian Film and Television School, the ABC, FACTS, Film Australia and the AFC, and that the co-operation in many ways marked a 'major breakthrough for the industry'.[39]

But David Morgan, the Deputy Federal Director of FACTS, was there to put the industry point of view and it would appear from his speech, in which he described the influences affecting the production of children's programs for commercial television in Australia, that nothing had really changed.

Of the total viewing audience, he explained, only 23% was under 13 years of age, and as 46% of all homes in Sydney and Melbourne were without children of school age the viewing needs of adults were paramount. Also, Australian-made children's programs could cost between $250 for a half-hour limited studio production, and $25,000 for a half-hour episode of a drama series. Therefore the latter, with only a limited market for programs in Australia, was not considered economically viable for an individual station, or even for a group of stations within a network.[40]

At the final session of the Seminar the participants responded by recommending that the possibility of forming a Children's Network Committee be explored, and that government and private sector finance be sought to assist the production of children's fiction programs for television.[41]

The Government took over a year to consider the recommendations in the ABT's Self-regulation Report, and in September 1978 a new Minister for Posts and Telecommunications, the Honourable A. Staley, announced that the ABT would set minimum standards for Australian content, and children's programs and advertising, and that in the future broadcasters would be directly accountable to the public through public licence procedures. A Children's Program Committee, recommended by the

ABT, would be appointed by the Tribunal to assist it in developing new program and advertising standards.[42]

Supporting children's television was becoming a long and very time-consuming activity for members of the public, and there was much, much more to come as the difficulties of participating in broadcasting and related inquiries became evident.

In 1978 the ACCFT/SACCFT, the TCCFT and the VCCFT all made submissions on television to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, and the first ABT public licence renewal hearings were scheduled for Adelaide in October.

There was no sign of the Broadcasting Information Office which had been recommended by the Tribunal to provide information and assistance to the participants in broadcasting inquiries, there was little publicity to inform the public about the hearings, and no clear guidelines or rules of procedure had been established.[43]

On the first day in Adelaide dozens of cameras, and television executives with their advisers from all parts of Australia, were much in evidence. '... we really felt weighed down by the knowledge that in Adelaide we would be setting precedents'.[44] But the precedents set at this,and subsequent hearings did little for the Tribunal's hope that the industry would, in the long-term, become fully self-regulating and directly accountable to the public through public inquiries.[45]

The SACCFT had prepared for the hearings by monitoring the three commercial channels in Adelaide and were amongst the few participants to provide hard data in support of their evidence. This evidence revealed that there was still an enormous gap between industry performance and public expectation. One channel, NWS9, in a bid to build audience numbers had introduced a 'super-month' just prior to the hearings. It offered 'huge' prizes to children, including a Suzuki, with all the usual methods of product promotion, including long-held close-ups, while the benefits of the products were described by program comperes.[46]

> *We found it incredible ... we just sat there with our stop watches and recorded the level of product promotions by children's program personalities, which we believed were in breach of the Standards.*[47]

It was a belief that was unexpectedly confirmed during the hearings by the Managing Director of NWS9, Mr. Rex Heading, an incident that was reported prominently in the 'Financial Review'.[48]

A more sensitive subject, the budgets for children's shows, was raised by other witnesses, some of whom had worked on these in Adelaide. They claimed that they were very low.[49] The Tribunal overcame its dilemma over this evidence by ruling that the channels could submit financial information in confidence. It was a ruling that concerned Sarah Guest because without this information she realised that the public would remain open to the usual accusations of subjectivity when criticising the quality of some productions.[50]

The Adelaide hearings continued for three-and-a-half controversial and much-publicised weeks, and children's television emerged once again as a major concern, but in the end the Tribunal announced that all licences had been renewed for the mandatory three-year period. One member, Janet Strickland, dissented.[51]

In Sydney the Tribunal's hopes of retaining informality at its public inquiries disappeared completely. There the hearings escalated into legal confrontation when the most influential licensees in the country, with their reputations and millions of dollars at stake, employed leading QCs to defend them. And it was in Sydney that, in the midst of the hearings, Janet Strickland resigned from her position as a Tribunal member.

The NSWCCFT, with members away on school holidays, was unable to gather material to prepare a submission in time to appear at the hearings in March, but

> *As things turned out, we were in effect content with having taken the opportunity of making our views known to the Tribunal, without having exposed ourselves to the grilling on the carpet of intense cross-examination and certain annihilation - particularly without the legal assistance enjoyed by the P and C (Parents' and Citizens') Association!*[52]

'Tribunal uproar ...' claimed the normally restrained 'Financial Review' when the Commonwealth Police were called in to clear the Court in Sydney after several individuals were refused permission to appear as 'interested parties' during the hearing into the renewal of the licence for TCN9.[53] The hoped-for informality had vanished, and with it went any possibility of open discussion between licensees and members of the public which had been requested by the ABT.[54]

The next round of hearings was in Melbourne where only three weeks before it commenced a revised information paper informed applicants and others wishing to appear of the rights they had to be represented. The rights of the applicants were clear, but the rights of others depended on Tribunal decision and whether or not they were to be recognised as an 'approved party' or 'tribunal witness'.[55] Sarah Guest, representing the VCCFT, was given 'approved party' status on two occasions which enabled her to cross-examine applicants, and once, at her own request, she appeared as a 'tribunal witness'. Others, including ACTAC, were given permission to appear as 'tribunal witnesses'. They were allowed to offer evidence relevant to each licence, but not to cross-examine the applicants. All were subject to cross examination by counsel representing the applicants.

Like most public groups and individuals the VCCFT could not afford legal representation, but it did receive help in the form of a $2,000 grant from the Victorian Education Department and this was used to employ an independent organisation to monitor advertising directed towards children.[56] Several hours of monitoring were also done by members and friends of the Council in preparing the submission, and for the first time during the inquiries a videotape, which Council members had compiled, was accepted as evidence in support of breaches of the advertising guidelines.[57]

But despite the evidence which suggested questionable performance by the licensees in relation to children's programs and advertising, the three Melbourne licences were renewed for the full three years. The Tribunal's report of the hearing suggests that it was pinning its hopes for an improvement on guidelines to be devised by its new Children's Program Committee.[58]

The Children's Program Committee (the CPC) had been appointed in November 1978 with Dr. Patricia Edgar as Chairman. Members chosen to represent the public were Joan Brennan from the Australian Film and Television School (and a member of the NSWCCFT), Sarah Guest of the VCCFT, and Frank Meaney from the NSW Department of Education (and a former member of the ACCFT). Industry representatives were Bruce Harris, Managing Director of the advertising agency SSC and B Lintas, and two members nominated by FACTS, Rex Heading, Managing Director of NWS9 in Adelaide, and David Morgan, the Deputy Federal Director of FACTS. Although the FACTS nominations were subsequently withdrawn, Rex Heading remained on the CPC as an individual and John Stapp, Group General Manager of Associated Broadcasting Services, replaced David Morgan.

In May 1979, just prior to the licence renewal hearings in Melbourne, the CPC had produced its first recommendations for children's programs. These, in order to give them some protection from mass audience programs, were to be screened on weekdays between 4 and 5 p.m. on all commercial channels.[59] Recommendations for advertising were submitted by the CPC to the Tribunal in November, and passed on to FACTS for comment.[60]

Once again there was some expectation of a better deal for children although, as far as the Children's Film and Television Councils were concerned, first time around the new system of public licence renewal hearings had not been very successful. Assistance for participants in the form of a Broadcasting Information Office had never eventuated, and the licensees had responded to the Tribunal's request for a Promise of Performance, which was regarded as an integral part of their accountability to the public, by simply undertaking to abide by the requirements of the Broadcasting and Television Act.

The participants in Adelaide who had dared to publicly criticise television industry performance were labelled pejoratively as 'academics', 'do-gooders' or 'narrow minority self-interest groups', to which Barbara Biggins replied:

> *It seems that if someone stirs himself to express views about tv he suddenly ceases to be a real person ... As we move around the community we find that the 'average mum and dad' certainly have views about tv but that they just do not know where to express their views with effect ...*[61]

But there were some positive signs in Adelaide. Members of the SACCFT were invited to join an NWS9 Advisory Committee, and they were also invited to preview new planning initiatives at other stations.[62]

The VCCFT believed that the hearings in Melbourne had helped to serve its aims of keeping the issue of children's television alive, and the industry aware of public opinion, but the process also had the effect of forcing the public into adopting what was, in Sarah Guest's opinion, an unacceptably negative role. And she found that with all the changes that had occurred participating was a very confusing, time consuming, and costly activity despite the work contributed voluntarily by VCCFT members. The preparation of a submission on behalf of an organisation had required gathering information, presenting a draft to member organisations and individuals, dealing with their various responses, and then preparing a final paper for approval.[63]

In 1979 the future seemed uncertain:

> *... it is doubtful whether the process as it now stands has much to offer the public in return for the great effort necessary to participate.*[64]

Licence renewal hearings, with evidence restricted to proving breaches of program standards by individual licensees, precluded the opportunity to publicly discuss the broader concerns: the long-term effects of television on children, the lack of program variety across all channels, the amount of violence, the amount and nature of television advertising, and the more complex questions of some of the values and behaviour which appeared to be endorsed by television.

These were issues raised in submissions to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts when in 1976 it decided to broaden its inquiry on television to include 'the impact of television on the development and learning behaviour of children'.[65] In 1978 the Senate Committee concluded that

> *... concern about children's television is widespread and acute, is long standing and is growing rather than abating. The Committee was conscious that some evidence was emotional and an unresearched response but was aware that most community groups and individuals worked on a voluntary basis and lacked the financial resources to undertake detailed research into the subject. However, we believe their concern to be genuine and could not accept the suggestion that it should be dismissed as the uninformed and unrepresentative opinion of a few well-meaning but over-zealous critics ...*[66]

The Senate Committee decided that because of the influence of industry economics any real improvements in children's programs would not be achieved with ABT proposals or legislation. It expressed the opinion that production for children should be largely by an independent authority.[67]

In 1979 the idea of a children's foundation was discussed again, this time by the people planning activities for the International Year of the Child in NSW. It captured the interest of NSW's Minister for the IYC, and Victoria's Assistant Minister for Education, the Honourable Norman Lacy who submitted a discussion paper on the proposal to the Australian Education Council the following year.[68]

This time, with the support of educational bodies and politicians, and with substantial government funding, a foundation was actually established. The new organisation, the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF), was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee in March 1982, with the aim of bringing together 'the industry's best resources', assisting with script development and the production of quality programs. It also aimed to adopt 'a public and educational function organising and promoting the issues surrounding children's television.'[69] Dr. Patricia Edgar was appointed the Foundation's first Director.

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[4] Julie James Bailey, 'Children's Television Report', ACCFT Seventh Biennial Conference, August, 1971

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[36] FACTS, 'A Supplementary Submission to the ABT', May, 1977, p. 2

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[38] ibid, p. 7

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[43] Betty Rankin, Interview with Barbara Biggins,13/3/84

[44] ibid

[45] ABT, 'Self-regulation for Broadcasters?', AGPS, Canberra, 1977, p. 135

[46] Betty Rankin, Interview with Barbara Biggins, 13/3/84

[47] ibid

[48] 'Financial Review', 1/11/78

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[50] 'Report from Sarah Guest to ACCFT and VCCFT', undated

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Chapter 11

New Directions in the 1980s

Economic imperatives, changes in technology and film distribution methods, and different audience behaviour all combined to influence the direction taken by the ACCFT in the 1980s.

The Victorian Ministry for the Arts responded to an application from the Councils for more space, and in 1980 both the Australian and Victorian Councils rose from the basement they had shared since 1974 to an office at ground floor level. It was a more visible base for both organisations, it gave them the much-needed space, and it was more convenient for their members and for the public.

The funding of ACCFT activities at this time came largely from the income it derived from the distribution of children's films, and in 1980 and 1981 this was supplemented with grants totalling $40,000 from the Australian Film Commission for new film purchases. However, in 1982 it was made clear that there would be no further financial assistance on a regular basis. The reason: 'that the Council is a largely self-sufficient organisation, principally involved in the distribution of foreign film productions.'[1]

It was true, but to members of the ACCFT it appeared to be a very limited definition of an organisation of volunteers who had for so long promoted the views that children needed and were entitled to films of their own; that films for children should be produced in Australia; that Australian children should have the best, both from Australia and from overseas; and, when no one else was prepared to do it, had for nearly 30 years ensured that films specially made for children would be available for regular exhibition in Australia.

In the 12 years from 1969, when it had received its first financial assistance from the Australian Council for the Arts (ACA), to 1981 when any regular government funding ceased, the ACCFT had been granted the modest sum of $123,000.[2] Small grants to assist with specific projects such as travel, publications, and the special event screenings arranged by individual State Councils became available later, but in 1983 the ACCFT's only source of funds was from the distribution of its films. In 1981 the Council recorded its first-ever loss. Two-thirds of its income of $72,000 came from the films it hired out through the State Councils. Although the total amount covered the business expenses of the national body, it was not sufficient to cover all the costs of co-ordinating the activities of its affiliated Councils at a national level.[3]

The ACCFT was faced with the question of survival: how could money be found to acquire the rights to new children's films which would enable it to generate income in the future?

Exclusive non-theatrical rights to the best Australian children's features had been secured by Young Australia Films, a business organisation against which the ACCFT as an affiliation of voluntary groups was unable to compete.[4] Ironically, its own State Councils were co-operating with Young Australia Films by encouraging the use of its films, especially in Tasmania where the TCCFT was actually taking bookings and arranging screenings in schools.

And money was not the only problem, there was also the difficulty of finding new cinema films. The CFF ceased production in 1982, so that source of features was no longer available, and few suitable films were being made in other English-speaking countries. The alternative, sub-titled foreign-language features, had only limited appeal for many Australian children.

The ACCFT tried once again to have a children's film produced in Australia and took out an option on Christabel Mattingley's story 'Battle of the Galah Trees'. A script was written and the AFC, Film Victoria and an independent company were approached for assistance, but to no avail.[5]

Gradually, television and the new video technology began to affect traditional film distribution methods and in 1983 the ACCFT decided not to renew the rights to its CFF theatrical films as they became due, or to renew the non-theatrical rights to older titles. Following long negotiations with Rank Film Distributors, the ACCFT was appointed the Australian agent for television and video sales of CFF titles in Australia. These sales provided useful funds for the ACCFT, although it was acknowledged that they would restrict the long-term use of the titles on film.[6] Unfortunately, this raised the old problem of conflict with the states, for in trying to develop a new and economically viable Australia-wide business operation the ACCFT was seen to be affecting potential revenue from their cinema screenings.

But the audiences for regular cinema screenings were disappearing. It was special events, and the occasional well-promoted film, which continued to bring the best response. In Melbourne in 1980 'Sammy's Super T Shirt' generated a gross return of $45,000 over the May school holidays[7] and 'Fern, the Red Deer' did well over a period of time, achieving in 15 months an Australia-wide box office return of $150,000, with an average admission charge of $1.50 per seat. In Elizabeth McDowall's opinion, '... a good film properly handled and given a fair chance by commercial exhibitors can return an excellent gross.'[8]

When the world premiere of the Tasmanian Film Corporation's 'Save the Lady' was held in Tasmania during the 1981 September school holidays, the Tasmanian Film Corporation, Tasmanian Theatre Holdings, Young Australia Films, the TCCFT and the ACCFT all co-operated in promotional activities which included extensive publicity on television. In Hobart the film was shown in competition with 'Clash of the Titans', 'Raiders of the Lost Ark', 'Stir Crazy' and Disney's '20,000 Leagues under the Sea' and proved to be the most popular holiday attraction.[9] But the same local interest and enthusiastic support was not evident in other cities. In NSW 'Save the Lady' failed to attract audiences over the following Christmas and New Year holiday period, and the VCCFT decided against participating in its release in Melbourne. The distributor, Yoram Gross, hired a public relations firm to handle the publicity, but without success.

> *... Further proof of how devastatingly difficult it is to market children's films without a substantial television budget and a great deal of luck.*[10]

Some of the State Councils organised special cinema events for children from schools when an appropriate film was available, in the belief that:

> *Children sharing cinema entertainment creates a special excitement that TV and video can never match ... In 1984 we screened 'Friend or Foe' and 'Danny's Egg' and we were glad to welcome Jim Badger who talked to the children about story writing. He was besieged by the young audience as we left the theatre - all wanting to tell him about their potential scripts!*[11]

In South Australia the International Film Festival for Children continued biennially, and in 1986 it was run competitively for the first time. Children from schools working with film and video were selected as jury members, and they assisted adult judges from France, Finland, Canada, Sweden, Yugoslavia and Australia.[12]

Children's holiday screenings were also held in some states, and a few film clubs continued or were successfully revived. But in the 1980s it was noticeable that it was primary school teachers, librarians, and the recreation officers from local government councils, rather than parents, who showed an interest in the selected children's features and shorts. Teachers had found the entertainment films from the Children's Film and Television Councils were enjoyed and readily understood by children; they were effective for disseminating information in a group; and they were useful as a starting point for class discussions. They were also useful for end-of-term treats. In 1980, 75% of the VCCFT clients for 16 mm programs came from primary schools.[13]

And in 1983 the TCCFT, operating in conjunction with the Tasmanian Education Department's Media Centre, experienced an all-time record with the distribution of its 16 mm films: 1,018 screenings were held, with 21 different features shown in 198 different locations, including the isolated Cape Barren, King, Flinders and Bruny Islands.[14]

Other State Councils were less active, especially NSW where the use of CFF films remained low despite considerable effort by the ACCFT, and a widespread publicity campaign by the NSWCCFT in 1983.[15]

The big change occurred with video technology. As its use in the community increased it seemed that the video-cassette recorder would introduce another option for the entertainment of children. This was an option which, if they desired, children and their parents could control in a way not possible with cinema films and broadcast television.

Video technology also provided an opportunity for the Children's Film and Television Councils to disseminate material more readily than in the past although, compared with film, the immediate returns from video distribution were small. But video-cassettes were very easy to transport, titles were available in multiple copies, and the old problems of distribution across Australia's vast spaces were eased.

Penny Spence, the Nine Network's Vice-President of Children's Programs, suggested a scheme for the free distribution of selected video-cassettes to children in hospitals, a suggestion that was quickly adopted by the New South Wales and Victorian Councils. It provided very useful experience in the handling of cassettes and in June 1984, when the commercial distribution of children's video material was discussed at an ACCFT meeting, two Councils, the VCCFT and the SACCFT, announced they would proceed with this independently.[16]

The Victorian Ministry for the Arts gave financial assistance to the VCCFT and it established the first specialist children's video library in Australia. The first titles were selected by a panel of VCCFT members and in order to assist the further purchases the early customers of the Children's Video Centre were asked to nominate favoured program categories. Those most desired were programs for the primary-school age group, followed by adaptations from literature, and Australian-produced programs.[17]

The Video Centre proved to be popular with parents, teachers and librarians and in 1986, eight months after it had leased a package of titles to the regional (book) libraries in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, the Children's Services Librarian reported that:

> *Very few of the 76 titles are ever on the shelves and most have at least four reservations on them at any given time. The library aimed to provide good children's material not readily available commercially such as classic stories and high quality feature films, a selection which has found a ready market in the child-populated, growing, new suburbs of Melbourne's outer east.*[18]

In 1985 the ACCFT assisted other State Councils to gather collections of video-cassettes for hire, and it started to build its own video distribution business by selling 'G' rated children's material to educational institutions and libraries, many located in remote areas.[19]

That was the positive side, but there was another side to video technology which the Councils discovered as they eagerly explored the possibilities for using the new medium.

There was no legislation to cover video content and this meant that material of all kinds was freely available in Australia. It also meant that classification, which the Councils had always regarded as essential for consumer information, was not compulsory. In the early 1980s it was possible for anyone to import a master tape, make unlimited copies and, according to the Chief Film Censor, Janet Strickland, an unsuspecting customer could hire a cassette labelled 'Cinderella' or 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' only to find that it was obscene.[20]

Legislation 'designed to ensure maximum freedom for adults' was proposed by the Federal Government but it fell far short of expectations for a uniform classification system and so the ACCFT, supported by its State Councils, began a new debate with politicians and the members of government departments.[21]

Even members of the video industry were confused. Under the proposed regulations only 'R' and 'X' tapes were expected to carry classification information, yet some of the large retailers insisted that a censor's classification be shown on all titles. There was concern over who would be responsible if material was found to be incorrectly labelled.[22]

The Attorneys-General and their representatives continued to meet, and the media also entered the debate, stimulated by the intervention of groups as diverse as the Festival of Light and feminists, plus the promotional visits to Australia by 'soft porn' actresses, and the outspoken moral campaigner Mary Whitehouse. Nervous state politicians became divided in their attitudes towards the proposed classification legislation and the new 'X' category, while the Children's Film and Television Councils persisted in their contention that for reliable consumer information, compulsory classification by an independent body and the clear marking of all cassettes was essential. Members of the Councils were convinced that few parents were aware of the type of material that was freely available, and the ACCFT suggested that 'X' rated material be totally excluded from any outlets patronised by children. The proposal that for the purposes of legislation video-cassettes could or should be treated in the same way as books was totally rejected by the Councils.[23]

Their advice was unheeded as Ministers concerned with the issue considered that the cost of a compulsory classification system would be too high, and that it was unnecessarily duplicating classification for the cinema. It was suggested that video-tapes, unlike films for the cinema or television, could be previewed by parents. The Attorney General, Senator Gareth Evans expressed his opinion that:

> *There is ... a limit to the extent which Governments can - or should - intrude in areas which are clearly the responsibility of parents.*[24]

Once again it was to be left to the parents, but how many parents had the time or the opportunity to preview tapes for their children? Video-cassettes, unlike books, could not be taken from a shelf for instant evaluation, and video libraries did not consider it necessary to provide viewing facilities for their customers. And as far as the usefulness of cinema classification was concerned, even a knowledgeable parent like children's film and television writer, Jill Morris, was caught when she found that a video-cassette of 'Saturday Night Fever' was the 'R' rated version (unmarked) rather than the 'M' rated television version that she and her teenage children were expecting.[25] There was also the problem of sensational and violent promotional trailers which, regardless of classification, some of the distributors were adding to their videotapes.[26]

In June 1984 the ACT legislative model was amended, making the classification of all videotapes in the ACT compulsory[27] and in August the Special Minister of State, the Honourable M.J. Young, announced the setting up of a Joint Select Committee on Video Censorship, with terms of reference that included estimating the effectiveness of the video legislation and the classification system, and video viewing by children.[28]

The SACCFT initiated a survey of 1,500 Adelaide children aged between 9 and 12 years. It revealed that the use of video cassette recorders was widespread and that the viewing of tapes ranging from 'G' to 'X' (or in a few cases 'unclassified') took place in a variety of locations.

> *Over a third of the children reported seeing videotapes containing extreme violence and horror, including mutilation and dismemberment, and even in the case of one videotape, rape by a tree ...*
>
> *There was no evidence of the traditional erotic pornography being in wide circulation amongst children. It may be that an exposed breast on the cover of a videotape is a clearer signal to parents about content than a small 'R' in one corner.*[29]

The survey results were submitted to the Senate Select Committee for its consideration.

The other debate, the endless debate over children's television, continued into the 1980s and the Children's Film and Television Councils found that the inquiries of the 1970s had stimulated wide interest in the responsiveness of the commercial television industry to the public, and in the effective regulation o television broadcasting.

A stream of discussion papers emanated from organisations as diverse as the Administrative Review Council, the Trade Practices Commission, the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Media Council of Australia. There were also papers from the ABT on proposals for cable television, radiated subscription television, satellite television, adequate and comprehensive programming, localism, the classification of programs, advertising time standards, amendments to the Broadcasting and Television Act, program promotions, alcohol and food advertising, and violence on television, as well as on new standards for children's programs, and advertising in children's time.

Barbara Biggins applied to the ACCFT for money to employ a part-time assistant to ease the work-load of volunteers in Adelaide. She estimated that in three months, 450 hours of volunteer effort were expended on research for the preparation of submissions, in lobbying politicians, evaluating legislation, seeking legal advice, general research, reading current literature and attending conferences.[30] Other State Councils, in particular the VCCFT, also responded separately to some of the papers being circulated.

And in an attempt to develop closer links with the community, the ABC established National and State Advisory Councils. Barbara Biggins of the SACCFT, Kay Chung of the TCCFT, and Betty Rankin of the VCCFT were appointed members of the first ABC Councils in their respective states.[31]

There were also changes to the ABT, and in recognition of the need for Tribunal members with legal experience a Melbourne lawyer, David Jones, was appointed to succeed Bruce Gyngell as chairman. Another ABT appointment, of particular interest to the ACCFT, was that of former NSWCCFT member, Julie James Bailey.

Further rounds of the three-yearly public hearings for the renewal of the commercial television licences were held, and the SACCFT and VCCFT made submissions to these.

Meanwhile, the ABT's Children's Program Committee (CPC) pursued its goals of having new standards fo children's and pre-school programs, and advertising in 'C' time, introduced.

The 'C' hour began on the commercial channels but the CPC was critical of the limited range of programs. It was new material of a short-segment, magazine-style only, accompanied by repeats of old drama series. There was little sign of any plans being made to fulfil the requirements for a diverse range of Australian material for showing in the future.[32]

The CPC issued draft standards for children's programs and advertising for public comment in 1982. This time a specific requirement for locally produced children's drama was included after a feasibility study indicated that:

> *Free market forces, under the current structure of the Australian commercial television industry, are unlikely to ensure that quality Australian children's drama is produced and televised.*

And:

> *The costs involved in producing the recommended quota levels (6 hours per year which was later increased to 8) are not significant in relation to the financial viability of the major metropolitan network producing stations.*[33]

In April 1984 the new comprehensive standards, the first since 1956, were determined 'with the intention of improving the quality and diversity of television available for children and pre-school children'.[34]

With regard for the past performance of the commercial channels the ABT recommended that the external regulation of advertising in 'C' time should continue[35] but it also decided that in view of the demand for better programs, and the revenue this required, FACTS' maximum level of 10 minutes of advertising per hour in children's time should remain.[36] To this it added an allowance of one minute for 'pro-social' advertising[37] and up to two minutes of program or station promotions.[38]

The requirements for regular 'C' classified programs remained, with the addition of a quota of eight hours of 'C' classified, first-release Australian drama to be transmitted by each channel per year.[39]

Several television licensees, opposed to these requirements, appealed to the Federal Court. Their Appeal was dismissed by Mr. Justice Wilcox, and later by a majority decision of the full Federal Court.[40] The Appeal was taken to the High Court which in May 1985 found that some of the Children's Television Standards were invalid, and that the ABT had no power to classify children's programs before they went to air.[41] The Parliament passed amendments to the Broadcasting and Television Act restoring the Tribunal's powers and, with a new section in the Amendment Act, it gave the Tribunal the necessary power to make standards requiring the pre-classification of children's television programs.[42]

After so many years of endeavour the advocates of children's television were convinced that, in spite of the constraints that regulation might impose on creative ideas, it was the only way of ensuring that any worthwhile programs would be made and screened for children. In practice the pre-classification of 'C' programs by the CPC did prove to be controversial, not only for the television channels and for potential producers, but even for the ACCFT.

The Council was incredulous when after 15 of the CFF features submitted had been given a 'C',[43] one of its more popular titles, 'Avalanche', was rejected by the CPC on the grounds that it was a 'Slow moving boring production which does not adequately contribute to the social, emotional or intellectual development of Australian children.'[44]

The ACCFT had appealed to the ABT on the grounds that 'Avalanche', a children's cinema film made on location in Austria, was enjoyed by children in Australia and it attempted to demonstrate this with written descriptions from children and with reports, all favourable, from three members of the ABT staff.[45] But the CPC wanted an 'Australian look' for its 'C' programs, and it was not happy with some of the 'cultural values' portrayed in 'Avalanche'.[46] The appeal was denied.

The rejection of 'Avalanche' was a blow to ACCFT expectations that the film might be sold to commercial television, and it was perceived by the Council to be a criticism of its judgment; judgment that had been gained after several years of selecting and screening films for children in Australia. Patricia Braithwaite expressed her disappointment that:

> *... the Council has to continually justify its position and prove itself. We are, after all, experienced professional people with a particular concern for children. I sometimes think that, by promoting the Council as a 'voluntary welfare organisation', we are seen by some to be 'do gooders' who meet over afternoon tea. We do 'do good' and will continue to do so in the structured and professional way we have developed over the years.*[47]

Sarah Guest was also disturbed by the incident and believing that Patricia Edgar, in her dual roles as Chairman of the CPC and full-time director of the Australian Children's Television Foundation, had a conflict of interest, she resigned from the Committee.[48] Barbara Biggins of the SACCFT was appointed to fill the vacancy.

However, despite all the difficulties of implementing regulations in an area as controversial as the production and choice of television programs for children, the 'C' hour and the children's drama quota did give rise to expectations that a regular market would be created in Australia. The interest of independent producers was aroused, and the new Australian Children's Television Foundation, with government contributions totalling $2,395,746 over its first three years, was ready to encourage and assist them. In 1983 a subsidiary company, ACTF Productions Ltd, was incorporated to ensure the production of an anthology of one-hour television dramas - the ACTF's 'Winners' series.[49]

Some of the commercial television channels were motivated to take initiatives of their own and Sydney's TCN9 participated in a European Drama Exchange (EDU) designed to encourage the production of children's drama in different countries. TCN9's half-hour contribution, 'Danny's Egg', later shared first prize in the story section of the 1984 Prix Jeunesse awards with an adaptation of Raymond Briggs's story 'The Snowman', which had been made for Britain's new commercial Channel 4. At the same event 'The Curiosity Show', a long-running children's program from Adelaide's NWS9, shared first prize in the information section. Henry Geddes was absolutely delighted. 'Australia is looking good' he exclaimed with great enthusiasm on his return to London after the Prix Jeunesse meeting.[50]

Another encouraging event was the re-establishment of the CFF in Britain as the 'Children's Film and Television Foundation' (CFTF). The Head of Children's Programs for the BBC, Edward Barnes, and the Managing Director of Rank Film Distributors, Fred Turner, joined the Board, and Henry Geddes was appointed to the CFTF's Executive Committee. Arrangements between the BBC and Rank Film Distributors assured finance for the production of three feature films each year for three years.[51]

But by 1988 the CFTF was no longer a producer of children's films for paradoxically, in a world of film, television, video, cable and satellite, in which its catalogue of children's titles has become more valuable, the increased expense of production has put the making of full-length stories for children beyond it. It is now in the business of

> *promoting, pump-priming, and occasionally part-financing feature films especially suitable for children between 5 and 12 years old.*[52]

for

> *As the children of the world multiply, and the screens of the world proliferate, the need for children's films of real quality is greater not smaller.*[53]

The world-wide influence of the American commercial television networks continues to be of concern for the advocates of children's entertainment productions, just as the enormous influence of the American motion picture industry caused concern in the 1950s and 1960s.

It is a concern that is constantly reinforced by the attitudes and productions of these American industries. At the 30th General Assembly of the ICFCYP held in the United States in August 1985, local commercial television executives described a boom in programs for children and explained that the success of a children's movie or television program depended not so much on its quality, but on its 'marketability'. This could be achieved with brand-name association, or with the use of characters familiar to children and their parents. The result was a proliferation of animated series linked with the marketing of toys and characters such as the Care Bears, Transformers, He-Man, and Mr. T.

This emphasis on the 'commercialisation' of program content, rather than on quality, held little appeal for many of the international delegates to the Assembly, including Australians Patricia Braithwaite and Elizabeth McDowall. They were already familiar with television for children in their own countries which was dominated by American produced animated programs and they were not at all impressed by the new trend.[54]

But the Vice-President of children's programmes for one of the major commercial networks, NBC-TV, explained that as American children were isolated from anything but the US experience, offering variety on commercial television with international programming was considered too difficult.[55]

In the United States the challenge of providing for children in a more responsible way remains with the multi-funded US Public Broadcasting System (PBS) which screens 'Sesame Street' and 'Wonderworks', a prime-time series of dramas for children and young people selected from a variety of American and international, including Australian, sources.[56]

In Australia, the ACTF has found in its first years of production that there is no shortage of Australians wanting to make programs for children but to have any chance of success their productions have to be energetically promoted and distributed. And despite the opportunities which exist for sales to other countries, and to the video market, Australian commercial television remains crucial if the productions for children, especially drama, are to be seen and developed.[57]

The rhetoric in support of children's programs of quality remains and in the 1980s recognition has been given to the work done in Australia by Children's Film and Television Council members Patricia Braithwaite who was awarded an AM, and Barbara Biggins, an OAM. The Director of the Australian Children's Television Foundation, Dr. Patricia Edgar, received an AM. Their contribution, and that of all the people who have worked with them, and before them, has been immense.

The unique Australian 'C' classification for television now stands as a tangible symbol of the need for quality programs designed specifically for children but, if history is any guide, continuing public interest and the co-operation of the powerful commercial television industry will be essential if they are to develop as intended.

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